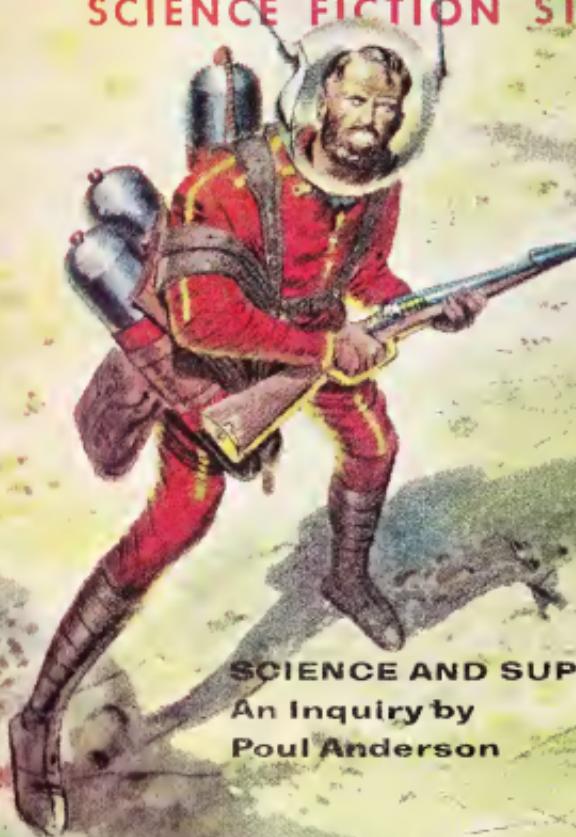


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Sneak Preview

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NOVEMBER 1959

Volume 33 Number 11

COMPLETE NOVEL

SNEAK PREVIEW

By Robert Bloch 50

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Editorial

I DON'T know how many of you read AMAZING from front to back, but for our purposes this month I'd like to request that you read Bob Bloch's hard-hitting novel, "Sneak Preview," which starts on P. 50, before you go any further with this editorial.

* * *

OK . . . You back again? Great story, wasn't it? Did you think it was pretty fanciful, a little too imaginative? Well, now hear this: Not too many weeks ago a Hollywood psychoanalyst reported tests that prove the time needed for psychoanalysis can be halved by showing patients powerful movies that depict graphically their inner conflicts!

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But there can be bad effects if the viewer is *not* in analysis—stress, imaginary illness, depression, even juvenile delinquency. Perhaps you'd better take to the couch before you go to your next movie.

But at any rate, that boy Bloch is a pretty good seer, eh? Down, Nostradamus! Down, boy!—NL

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General Webb had a simply magnificent idea for getting ground forces into the enemy's territory despite rockets and missiles and things like that. It was a grand scheme, except for one

MINOR DETAIL

By JACK SHARKEY

THE Secretary of Defense, flown in by special plane from the new Capitol Building in Denver, trotted down the ramp with his right hand outstretched before him.

At the base of the ramp his hand was touched, clutched and hidden by the right hand of General "Smiley" Webb in a hearty parody of a casual handshake. General Webb did everything in a big way, and that included even little things like handshakes.

Retrieving his hand once more, James Whitlow, the Secretary of Defense, smiled nervously with his tiny mouth, and said,

"Well, here I am."

This statement was taken down by a hovering circle of newsreporters, dispatched by wireless and telephone to every

town in the forty-nine states, expanded, contracted, quoted and misquoted, ignored and misconstrued, and then forgotten; all this in a matter of hours.

The nation, hearing it, put aside its wonted trepidations, took an extra tranquilizer or two, and felt secure once more. The government was in good hands.

Leaving the reporters in a disgruntled group beyond the cyclone - fence - and - barbed - wire barriers surrounding Project W, General Webb, seated beside Whitlow in the back of his private car, sighed and folded his arms.

"You'll be amazed!" he chortled, nudging his companion with a bony elbow.

"I—I expect so," said Whitlow, clinging to his brief case

with both hands. It contained, among other things, a volume of mystery stories and a ham sandwich, neatly packaged in aluminum foil. Whitlow didn't want to chance losing it. Not, at least, until he'd eaten the sandwich.

"Of course, you're wondering where I got the idea for my project," said "Smiley" Webb, adding, for the benefit of his driver, "Keep your eyes on the road, Sergeant! The WAC barracks will still be there when you get off duty!"

"Yes, sir," came a hollow grunt from the front seat.

"Weren't you?" asked General Webb, gleaming a toothy smile in Whitlow's direction.

"Weren't I *what*?" Whitlow asked miserably, having lost the thread of their conversation due to a surreptitious glance backward at the WAC barracks in their wake.

"Wondering about the project!" snapped the general.

"Yes. We *all* were," said the Secretary of Defense, appending somewhat tartly, "That's why they *sent* me here."

"To be sure. To be sure." General Webb muttered. He didn't much like tartness in responses, but the Secretary of Defense, unfortunately, was hardly a subordinate, and therefore not subject to the general's choler. Silly little ass! he said to himself. Rather liking the sound of the words—albeit in his mind—he repeated them over again, adding embellishments like "pompous" and "mousy" and

"squirrel-eyed." After three or four such thoughts, the general felt much better.

"I thought the whole thing up, myself," he said, proudly.

"I wish you'd stop being so ambiguous," Whitlow protested in a small voice. "Just what is this project? How does it work? Will it help us win the war?"

"*Sssh!*" said the general, jerking a quivering forefinger perpendicular before pursed lips. "Security!"

He closed one eye in a broad wink and wriggled a thumb in the direction of the driver. "He's only cleared for Confidential material," said the general, his tone casting aspersions on the sergeant's patriotism, anatomy and personal hygiene. "This project is, of course, *Top Secret!*" He said the words reverently, his face going all noble and brave. Whitlow half-expelled him to remove his hat, but he did not.

They drove onward, in silence, until they passed a large field, in the center of which Whitlow could discern the outlines of an immense building, in front of a tall, somewhat rickety khaki-colored revolving stand, draped in tired bunting.

"What's that?" asked Whitlow, relinquishing his grip on his brief case long enough to point toward the field.

"*Sssh!*" said "Smiley" Webb. "You'll find out in a matter of hours."

"Many hours?" Whitlow a-

ed, thinking of the ham sandwich.

General Webb consulted a magnificent platinum timepiece anchored to his thick hairy wrist by a stout leather strap.

"In exactly one hour, thirty-seven minutes, and forty - three-point - oh - oh - nine seconds!" he said, proudly.

"Thank you," Whitlow sighed. "You're certainly running this thing—whatever it is—in an efficient manner."

"Thank you!" General Webb glowed. "We like to think so," he added modestly.

Passwords, signs, counter-signs, combination-locks and electronic recognition signals were negotiated one by one, until Whitlow was despairing of ever getting into the heart of Project W. He said as much to General Webb, who merely flashed the grin which gave him his nickname, and opened a final door.

For a moment, Whitlow thought he was going deaf. The shrill roar of screeching metal and throbbing dynamos that pounded at his eardrums began to fuddle his mind, until General Webb handed him a small cardboard box—also stamped, like every door and wall in the place, "Top Secret"—in which his trembling fingers located two ordinary rubber earplugs, which he instantly put to good use.

"There she is!" said General Webb, proudly, gesturing over

the railing of the small balcony upon which they stood. "The Whirligig!"

"What?" called Secretary of Defense Whitlow, shaking his head to indicate he hadn't heard a word.

Somewhat piqued, but resigned, General Webb leaned his wide mouth nearly up against Whitlow's small pink plugged ear, and roared the same information at the top of his lungs.

Whitlow, a little stunned by the volume despite the plugs, nodded wearily, to indicate that he'd heard, then asked, in a high, piping voice, "What's it for?"

Webb's eyes bulged in their sockets. "Great heavens, man, can't you *see*?" He gestured down at his creation, his baby, his project, as though it were self-evident what its function was.

Whitlow strained his eyes to divine anything that might give a clue as to just what the government had been pouring money into for the past eight months. All he saw was what appeared to be a sort of ferris-wheel, except that it was revolving in a horizontal plane. The structure was completely enclosed in metal, and was whirling too fast for even the central shaft to be anything but a hazy, silver-blue blur.

"I see it," he shouted, squeakily. "But I don't understand it!"

"Come with me," said General Webb, re-opening the door at their backs. He was just about to step through when, with a

quick blush of mortification, he remembered the "Top Secret" earplugs. Hastily, averting his face lest the other man see his embarrassment, he returned his plugs to their box, and did the same with Whitlow's.

Whitlow was glad when the door closed behind them.

"My office is this way," said Webb striding off in a stiff military manner.

Whitlow, with a forlorn shrug, could do nothing but clutch his brief case and follow.

"It's this way," General Webb began, once they were seated uncomfortably in his office. From a pocket in his khaki jacket, Webb had produced a big-bowled calabash pipe, and was puffing its noxious gray fumes in all directions while he spoke. "Up until the late fifties, war was a simple thing . . ."

Oh, not the March of Science Speech! said Whitlow to himself. He knew it by heart. It was the talk of the Capital, and the nightmare of military strategists. As the general's voice droned on and on, Whitlow barely listened. The general, Top Secret or no Top Secret, was divulging nothing that wasn't common knowledge from the ruins of Philadelphia to the great Hollywood crater . . .

All at once, weapons had gotten *too* good. That was the whole problem. Wars, no matter what the abilities of the death-dealing guns, cannon, rifles, rockets or whatever, needed one thing on

the battlefield that could not be turned out in a factory: Men.

In order to win a war, a country must be vanquished. In order to vanquish a country, soldiers must be landed. And that was precisely wherein the difficulty lay: landing the soldiers.

Ships were nearly obsolete in this respect. Landing barges could be blown out of the water as fast as they were let down into it.

Paratroops were likewise hopeless. The slow-moving troop-carrying planes daren't even peek above the enemy's horizon without chancing an onslaught of "thinking" rockets that would stay on their trail until they were molten cinders falling into the sea.

So someone invented the supersonic carrier. This was pretty good, allowing the planes to come in high and fast over the enemy's territory, as fast as the land-to-air missiles themselves. The only drawback was that the first men to try parachuting at that speed were battered to confetti by the slipstream of their own carriers. That would not do.

Next, someone thought of the capsules. Each man was packed into a break-proof, shock-proof, water-proof, wind-proof plastic capsule, and ejected safely beyond the slipstream area of the carriers, at which point, each capsule sprouted a silken chute that lowered the enclosed men gently down into range of the enemy's rocket-fire . . .

This plan was scrapped like the others.

And so, things were at a stalemate. There hadn't been a really good skirmish for nearly five years. War was hardly anything but a memory, what with both sides practically omnipotent. Unless troops could be landed, war was downright impossible. And, no one could land troops, so there was no war.

As a matter of fact, Whitlow *liked* the state of affairs. To be Secretary of Defense during a years-long peace was a soft job to top all soft jobs. And Whitlow didn't much like war. He'd rather live peacefully with his mystery stories and ham sandwiches.

But the Capitol, under the relentless lobbying of the munitions interests, was trying to find a way to get a war started.

They *had* tried simply bombing the other countries, but it hadn't worked out too well: the other countries had bombed back.

This plan had been scrapped as too dangerous.

And then, just when all seemed lost, when it looked as though mankind was doomed to eternal peace . . .

Along came General "Smiley" Webb.

"Land troops?" he'd said, confidently, "nothing easier. With the government's cooperation, I can have our troops in any country in the world, safely landed, within the space of one year!"

Congress had voted him the

money unanimously, and off he'd gone to work at Project W. No one knew *quite* what it was about, but the general had seemed so self-assured that—Well, they'd almost forgotten about him until some ambitious clerk, trying to balance at least part of the budget, had discovered a monthly expenditure to an obscure base in the southwest totalling some millions of dollars. Perfunctory checking had brought out the fact that "Smiley" Webb had been drawing this money every month, and hadn't as much as mailed in a single progress report.

There'd been swift phone-calls from Denver to Project W, and, General Webb informed them, not only was all the money to be accounted for, but so was all the time and effort: the project was completed, and about to be tested. Would someone like to come down and watch?

Someone would.

And thus it was that James Whitlow, with mystery stories and ham sandwich, had taken the first plane from the Capital . . .

" . . . when all at once, I thought: Speed! Endurance! That is the problem!" said Webb, breaking in on Whitlow's reverie.

"I beg your pardon?" said the Secretary of Defense.

Webb whacked the dottle out of his pipe into a meaty palm, tossed the smoking cinders rather carelessly into a wastec-

basket, and leaned forward to confront the other man face to face, their noses almost nudging.

"Why are parachutes out?" he snapped.

"They go too slow," said Whitlow.

"Why do we use parachutes at all?"

"To keep the men from getting killed by the fall."

"Why does a fall kill the men?"

"It— It breaks their bones and stuff."

"Bah!" Webb scoffed.

"Bah?" reiterated Whitlow.
"Bah?"

"Certainly bah!" said the general. "All it takes is a little training."

"All *what* takes?" said Whitlow, helplessly.

"Falling, man, falling!" the general boomed. "If a man can fall safely from ten feet— Why not from ten times ten feet!?"

"Because," said Whitlow, "increasing height accelerates the rate of falling, and—"

"Poppycock!" the general roared.

"Yes, sir," said Whitlow, somewhat cowed.

"Muscle-building. That's the secret. Endurance. Stress. Strain. Tension."

"If— If you say so . . ." said Whitlow, slumping lower and lower in his chair as the general's massive form leaned precariously over him. "But—"

"Of course you are puzzled,"

said the general, suddenly chummy. "Anyone would be. Until they realized the use to which I've put the Whirligig!"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so . . ." said Whitlow, thinking longingly of his ham sandwich, and its crunchy, moist green smear of pickle relish.

"The first day—" said General Webb, "it revolved at *one* gravity! They *withstood* it!"

"What did? Who *withstood*? When?" asked Whitlow, with much confusion.

"The men!" said the general, irritably. "The men in the Whirligig!"

Whitlow jerked bolt upright. "There are *men* in that thing?" It's not possible, he thought.

"Of course," said Webb, soothingly. "But they're all right. They've been in there for ~~thirty~~ days, whirling around at ~~one~~ gravity more each day. We have constant telephone communication with them. They're all ~~feeling~~ fine, just fine."

"But—" Whitlow said, weakly.

General Webb had him firmly by the arm, and was leading him out of the office. "We ~~have~~ to go to the stands, man. Operation Human Bomb in ten minutes."

"Bomb?" Whitlow squeaked, scurrying along. Webb ~~was~~ the larger man strode down the echoing corridor.

"A euphemism, of course," said Webb. "Because they will fall much like a bomb does. But they will not explode! No, they will land, rifles in hand, ready

to take over the enemy territory."

"Without parachutes?" Whitlow marveled.

"Exactly," said the general, leading the way out into the blinding desert sunlight. "You see," he remarked, as they strolled toward the heat-shimmering outlines of the reviewing stand, its bunting hanging limp and faded in the dry, breezeless air, "it's really so simple I'm astonished the enemy didn't think of it first. Though, of course, I'm glad they didn't— Ha! ha!" He oozed self-appreciation.

"Ha ha," repeated Whitlow, with little enthusiasm.

"When one is whirled at one gravity, you see, the wall—the outside rim—of the Whirligig, becomes the floor for the men inside. Each day, they have spent up to ten hours doing nothing but deep knee-bends, and eating high protein foods. Their legs will be able to withstand *any* force of landing. If they can do deep knee-bends at thirty gravities—during which, of course, each of them weighed *nearly* three tons—they can jump from any height and survive. Good, hah?"

Whitlow was worried as they lumbered up into the stands. There seemed to be no one about but the two of them.

"Who else is coming?" he asked.

"Just us," said Webb. "I'm the only one with a clearance high enough to watch this. You're

only here because you're *my* guest."

"But—" said Whitlow, observing the heat-baked wide-open spaces extending on all sides of the reviewing stand and bull's-eye, "the men on this base can surely watch from almost anywhere not beyond the horizon."

"They'd *better* not!" was the general's only comment.

"Well," said Whitlow, "what happens now?"

"The men that were in that Whirligig have—since you and I went to my office to chat—been transported to the airfield, from which point they were taken aloft—" he consulted his watch, "five minutes, and fifty-five-point-six seconds ago."

"And?" asked Whitlow, casually unbuckling the straps of his brief case and slipping out his sandwich.

"The plane will be within bomb vector of this target in just ten seconds!" said Webb, confidently.

Whitlow listened, for the next nine seconds, then, rising on schedule, he heard the usual droving of a plane, high up. Webb jogged him with an elbow. "They'll fall faster than any known enemy weapon can kill them," he said, smugly.

"That's fortunate," said Whitlow, marching deliberately to his sandwich. "But don't you think they budduh bee?"

"Hmmf?" asked the general.

Whitlow swallowed hastily. "I say, there's one thing to have me."

"What's that?" asked the general.

"Well, it's just that gravity is centripetal, you know, and the Whirligig is centrifugal. I wondered if it might not make some sort of difference?"

"Bah!" said General Webb. "Just a minor detail."

"If you say so," Whitlow shrugged.

"There they come!" shouted the general, jumping to his feet.

Whitlow, despite his misgivings, found that he, too, was on his feet, staring skyward at the tiny dots that were detaching themselves from the shining bulk of the carrier plane. As he watched, his heart beating madly, the dots grew bigger, and soon, awfully soon, they could be distinguished as man-shaped, too.

"There's— There's something

wrong!" said the general. "What's that they're all shouting? It should be 'Geronimo' . . ."

Whitlow listened. "It sounds more like 'Eeeeeyaaaaa,'" he said.

And it was.

The sound grew from a distant mumble to a shrieking roar, and the next thing, each man had landed upon the concrete-and-paint bullseye before the reviewing stand.

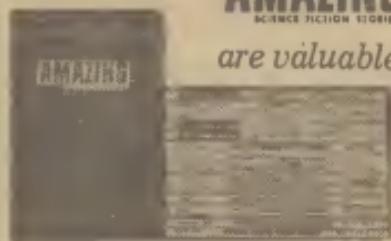
Whitlow sighed and re-buckled his brief case.

The general moaned and fainted.

And the men of the Whirligig, all of whom had landed on the target head-first, did nothing, their magnificently-muscled legs waving idly in a sudden gentle gust of desert breeze.

THE END

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THE OBSERVERS

By G. L. VANDENBURG

You can't be too suspicious when security is at stake. When everybody who is offer a key military job wears a toupee, it is obviously a bold case of espionage.

A JOB as laboratory technician with the Army Weapons Development Center carried about as much prestige as a bat boy in a World Series.

George Fisher was a laboratory technician.

He was a shy but likeable fellow, a diligent worker and trustworthy. He didn't talk. He was rarely talked to. He had no burning ambition to push himself ahead in the world. Being an assistant to the brains was good enough for him. He had a commendable talent for minding his own business.

In a security job these qualities counted ahead of scientific knowledge.

One day George Fisher turned up dead. The initial shock and concern experienced by his superiors was soon overcome by the coroner's finding. Suicide.

Harry Payne was the Civilian Personnel Director of Fort Dickson. It was his job to find a replacement for George Fisher.

"Miss Conway!" Harry's voice lashed into the intercom.

There was an interminable pause. He cursed under his breath.

Then, "Yes, Mr. Payne?"

"Where the hell were you? Never mind. Bring me the file on George Fisher."

"George Fisher?" Miss Conway was in her favorite state of mind . . . confusion. "But he's dead, isn't he?"

Harry let out a deep anguish-ed groan. "Yes, Miss Conway, he's dead. That's why I want his file. That answer your question?"

"Yes, sir. Be there in a jiffy!"

Harry could tell she was bub-bling over with smiles as she

spoke. A few more centuries would pass, he thought, before they manufactured another broad as dumb as Miss Conway.

He stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked out the widow. Across the parade ground he could see the Army Weapons Development Center. He had no idea what new bomb they might be working on behind those heavily guarded fences. He didn't care.

He was only concerned with the people who worked there. The rest of Fort Dickson used mostly Civil Service Personnel. But the barricaded security jungle across the parade grounds was more particular about its hired help. A person's record had to be spotless almost from the day of his conception . . . or a person could not even gain entrance.

Harry had never been inside Weapons Development. He had once been to traffic court as a roaring juvenile eighteen years before. That was enough to bar him from even visiting. He realized, though, that the army could afford to take chances.

Hiring new technicians required an arduous screening process. Harry loathed it. He was thankful that the personnel at Weapons Development were highly paid and usually permanent. He never had to hire more than one person a year.

Miss Conway swept into the office and handed Harry the folder.

"Thanks," he muttered.

"Don't mention it, boss."

Harry called after her as she went back toward the reception room.

"Stay by your desk, will you? The government may need you."

A muffled giggle was her only response.

Miss Conway was a civil service employee. She had been Harry's secretary for six months. Like most other civil service personnel, according to Harry's way of thinking she was a tower of inefficiency. His chief annoyance stemmed from the fact that the army had arbitrarily placed her in his office. He had been given no choice in the matter. It was one hell of a way to treat a personnel director, he thought.

He sat at his desk gloomily aware of the headaches he'd have to face in his quest for George Fisher's replacement. He opened the folder and glanced at the vital statistics.

Fisher, George—Age: 40—
weight: 160—Height: 5'9"—
Eyes: Green — Hair: None
—Complexion: Light—Date of
Employment: 10/7 58—Date of
Departure: 4/12 59—Reason:
Suicide—etc., etc. Harry yawned. Statistics bored him.

He turned to a page marked "Qualifications" and started reading. The phrase "Education and experience in nuclear physics required," caught his eye. The requirement was no surprise to him. But whenever he saw it he took a few minutes off to in-

dulge his curiosity. What was the big project at Weapons Development? He'd love to know. He wouldn't find out, of course. And the inability to find out naturally gave his imagination the widest latitude. His most persistent theory involved an atomic powered rocket capable of knocking the Russians' manned satellites out of space. The Russians were still ahead of everyone and their latest satellites were heavily armed. As usual they were lording it over the rest of the world. And the rest of the world had not come up with an effective answer to this challenge.

Harry closed the folder. He glanced at a list of technical schools. He would call each of them and ask them to submit a list of lab technicians. He would also look over the field of technicians still left in private enterprise.

The intercom buzzed.

"What is it, Miss Conway?"

"Miss Ralston is here."

"Who is Miss Ralston?"

"She has an appointment with you."

"An appointment!" Harry was baffled. "Who made it?"

"I did. I guess I forgot to tell you."

Harry closed his eyes and counted to ten. "Thank you, Miss Conway. Will you step into my office for a moment?" He tried to control his mounting anger.

She breezed into the office.

"Now, Miss Conway, will you

please tell me who is this Miss Ralston?"

"She operates 'Ralston Personnel Consultants'. I think she wants to talk to you about the replacement for George Fisher. You know, the one who died."

"Yes, yes, I know. And you know, Miss Conway, we don't do business through agencies."

"Oh, Miss Ralston doesn't run an agency. She told me. Her business is much more exclusive than that. She handles very highly specialized people. That's the reason why . . ."

"I know. That's why you gave her an appointment with me," said the exasperated personnel director. "Well, you can go right back out and tell her I've cancelled the appointment. This is a security job we're filling and . . ."

Before Harry could utter another syllable his attention was drawn to the doorway. The view to the outer office was blocked by a bundle of curves. The most alluring female bombshell his eyes had ever beheld put everything important out of his mind.

"I didn't realize you were being so inconvenienced, Mr. Payne. I'm terribly sorry." Her eyes drooped. "I can take my business elsewhere." Miss Ralston's voice was just above a half whisper. The words came out warm and intoxicating.

"No, wait! Wait a minute, Miss Ralston." Harry was out of his chair and at the door. He took her arm. "Who said any-

thing about inconvenience? Come in. Come in. That'll be all Miss Conway. Thanks."

The secretary giggled and left. Miss Ralston sat down and lit a cigarette. Harry noticed she was wearing a beige knit suit with a neckline that spoke volumes. Every curve was in the right place. Every movement had another movement all its own.

Harry knew she was bound to talk business and he knew there wasn't much he could do for her in that direction. But at thirty-five, and eligible, he just couldn't let this woman leave his office. Harry Payne was a sucker for a gorgeous face. He knew it and he knew the gorgeous face knew it.

"Tell me, Miss Ralston, when did my secretary arrange this appointment for you?"

"I called yesterday."

Harry arched his eyebrows and smiled. "Yesterday? What prompted you to call me?"

"You're looking for a laboratory technician, aren't you?"

"What gave you that idea?" he asked, not caring in the slightest what gave it to her.

"I make it my business to comb the papers every day, Mr. Payne. I came across the news of George Fisher's suicide and called you. Simple as that."

"You don't waste any time."

She smiled and pursed her lips. "Do you?"

"I try not to."

"I have seven clients who would qualify for the job. I'd appreciate it if you'd see them."

"Well, as a matter of fact, Miss Ralston . . ."

She leaned forward with an inquisitive "Yes?"

Harry cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact I'm not supposed to do business with civilian agencies."

"Mr. Payne," she smiled demurely, "do I look like an agency? Or do I look like a Personnel Consultant?"

Now there was an opening, Harry thought, but it might be best to avoid it. "You're working to get someone a job. It amounts to the same thing."

"I see. Then how do you go about hiring your new personnel?"

"I do the soliciting myself. Sorry, Miss Ralston, but I don't make the rules and regulations."

But the lady was undeterred. She crossed her legs and sank further into the easy chair. Her eyes sparkled at Harry.

"These clients of mine are all top men, Mr. Payne. Why couldn't I just leave you their names? You can still do the soliciting. I'd be happy to forego my regular commission on this job. Call it the value of prestige."

Harry recognized another opening and this time plunged in. "Suppose we talk it over later. There's a place at Fourth Avenue and Woodward called 'Maria's.' Best Italian food in captivity. I'm through at five. What about you?"

She didn't have to say an-

thing. Her eyes told him he would be having an Italian dinner that night. And not alone. She rose and walked in front of his desk.

"I'm so glad we have something in common, Mr. Payne. I can't think well on an empty stomach either."

After walking her to the outer office he came back to his desk. He took a deep breath and loosened his tie. Dreams like Miss Ralston didn't materialize every day. For a first meeting he figured he hadn't fared too badly at all. And if this first date went well he was sure he'd be seeing a lot of this girl.

It did not escape Harry's mind that here was a girl who was in the habit of getting what she wanted. But why not? Her powers of persuasion were Grade-A. They were so good they presented him with one big problem. He had regulations. Army regulations. He couldn't violate them. Miss Ralston, it was obvious, was going to meet him solely for the purpose of getting a client a job. Would he be able to see her again after she knew he had no intention of hiring that client?

The following morning Harry entered the office to find his secretary unusually busy. She was pecking away furiously at the typewriter.

He handed her a sheet of paper and said, "Miss Conway, copy these names and addresses and when they . . ."

"When they come in you'll see them at half-hour intervals." She smiled benignly. "Miss Ralston just called and told me. Pretty smart chick, huh, boss?"

Harry did a slow burn and ambled into his office. Miss Conway was right, of course, and that's what annoyed him. It had been quite a night. He wined and dined her. They did all the bright spots. And, wonder of wonders, on the first date they wound up at Paula Ralston's apartment. She was a captivating hostess, an exquisite dancer and something of a sorceress. After one kiss, an unforgettable one, Harry had agreed to interview her seven clients.

But all this was last night, Harry reminded himself. Today was a different matter. He was in the sanctity of his office now and capable of clearer thinking. Paula Ralston had accomplished the first phase of her mission. The next move was his. *Seeing the clients, he rationalized, was not violating the regulations.* And for the moment it satisfied her.

She certainly was a determined girl. Anyone would think, watching her operate, that a lab technician was a job of world shaking importance. What the hell, he shrugged, if the girl didn't look out for her own interests she wouldn't have a successful business. There's only one way to keep clients happy and that's to keep them busy.

Besides, her maneuvering wasn't going to work anyway. He

just couldn't hire any of them. His problem now was to stall her for a couple of days so he could keep seeing her. In the end he might possibly tell her the army had refused to accept any of them.

He glanced out the window and saw the Weapons Development Center across the parade ground. Business appeared to be going on as usual. Routine. Quiet. Cautious. *High time I start thinking seriously about that replacement*, he thought.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Miss Conway bounced in. "They've started to arrive. The first one is a mister Thompson."

"Okay, let's get started. Send him in."

Thompson was a small, roundish man in his mid-forties. He remained quite at ease during the interview. Harry began the session in the usual dull manner, formulating his questions from the several sheets of information Mr. Thompson had brought with him.

It wasn't long before Harry detected something unusual about the man. But he couldn't determine what it was. He became more alert, more interested as the interview progressed.

"Where are you from originally, Mr. Thompson?"

"Chicago."

"Oh, yes," he glanced at the written information, "I see you went to the University."

"Yes, sir. My practical experience is documented on the second sheet."

What was it about this guy? He was overly polite but that could hardly be considered strange. His answers were brief, to the point, even curt. That was just a personality trait, Harry supposed. Couldn't condemn a man for that.

"How long did you live in Chicago?"

"Twenty-one years, sir."

"Are you married?"

"No, sir."

He had noted before that Mr. Thompson had a distracting habit of patting his hair. Now he knew why. He was wearing a toupee. Harry wondered if the poor guy was sensitive about it. If he *was* that conscious of it, it might account for his strange attitude.

"Thank you for coming in, Mr. Thompson. I'll submit your papers to Colonel Waters. If he has any further interest in you don't be surprised if you receive a visit from a couple of Intelligence agents. That's routine for this job. I just tell you in advance so you won't worry."

"I understand," he said, rising and checking his toupee once more. "Many thanks to you, sir." He shook Harry's hand and left the room.

Harry glanced at the papers again. Mr. Thompson's background was impressive indeed. There didn't seem to be much question as to his ability. But what a queer duck he was!

The second applicant was a short, wiry man named Chase. Like his predecessor, he was brief and to the point with his answers. He let his qualification papers speak for themselves. He was formal and polite.

Midway through the interview Harry noticed that he too was wearing a toupee. If that wasn't the damnedest coincidence! Fortunately Mr. Chase didn't have the annoying habit of patting his head every thirty seconds. Harry guessed he either had a more expensive one or was just endowed with more confidence that it would not slip off.

The interview over, Mr. Chase offered his thanks and strolled out.

Harry had a few moments to himself before Paula's third client arrived. He thought about the first two men. Funny thing about toupees . . . even the most expensive ones could always be detected. He couldn't quite understand why the two men wore them. They were often used by playboys, actors, self-styled over age Romeos, people whose niche in society depends upon their looks. But not scientists or technicians. In fact Harry couldn't remember ever having known one such person who shunned his baldness in this manner. That didn't mean they had no right. But it did seem peculiar as hell.

By the time the third interview was over Harry Payne's curiosity was ablaze. Applicant number three, Mr. Boles, was

not only wearing a toupee but had gone one step further. Just north of his mouth there was a mustache! A good looking mustache, well groomed and shaped, but phoney as a wax banana.

For a moment he thought Paula Ralston might be perpetrating a joke of elaborate proportions. He rejected the idea as fast as it came to him. He didn't know the girl very well yet, but he knew her well enough to know she was strictly business. *She wanted one of these men to get that job.*

He flipped the intercom button for Miss Conway. She might be able to tell him . . . indirectly.

"You wanted me, Mr. Payne?"

"Yes, Miss Conway. The three men who've already been in here . . . have you noticed anything strange about them?"

Her eyebrows merged and spelled perplexity. She pursed her lips and gave the matter the gravest consideration. Then she concluded, "Yes, something very strange."

Harry was hopeful. "What was it?"

"None of them did very much talking. Strictly anti-social types."

Harry groaned, realizing he should have known better. "Thank you, Miss Conway. That's all."

"The fourth guy is waiting outside."

"Let him sit for a couple of minutes, then send him in."

He decided to put the whole matter out of his mind and get

the interviews over as fast as possible. There were other, more serious duties to attend to. The toupee episode was probably nothing more than a crazy coincidence anyway. Strictly an item for Believe-It-Or-Not.

By two o'clock that afternoon the four remaining candidates had come and gone. And Harry Payne sat at his desk in the immediate aftermath questioning his sanity. All seven men wore toupees! It was incredible but true. And now the matter was one of deep and abiding concern to him. There was nothing funny about it. There was a touch of the macabre in it that rendered his flesh cold and weak.

He lit a cigarette and tried to pull his thoughts together. Seven men applying for the same job; seven men with one thing in common; seven men as bald as Doctor Cyclops. Harry had to abandon the notion that sheer coincidence brought these men together. That was too fantastic. They were brought together by design.

Their backgrounds varied in that they had all worked and come from different parts of the country. But those facts were only on paper. It was an odds-on bet they all knew each other. There was even something about the order in which they arrived at the office that indicated a pattern or an over-all plan. Numbers three, five and six had worn false mustaches.

If it was true the seven men were well acquainted then Paula Ralston could undoubtedly give him some answers. Harry had another dinner engagement with her at five o'clock. But this date, he told himself, would be different. *He* was going to be all business until he learned exactly what she was involved in.

He picked up the phone, got an outside line and dialed. Frank Barnes was a private detective. A good one. Harry was sure he could rely on him for a small favor.

A subdued, resonant voice answered on the other end.

"Frank, Harry Payne here."

"Harry! Where you been hiding?"

"I need a favor."

"Only time you ever call me, you ingrate."

"There's a dame called Paula Ralston. Runs a business called Ralston Personnel Consultants. How soon can you get anything on her?"

"How soon do you need it?"

"Today, if possible. You can call me at home. Any hour."

After promising Frank to meet him for lunch one day Harry sank into an easy chair and tried to shake the unnerving effect the seven men had had on him.

Maybe he shouldn't have called Frank. This might be something he should have informed the army about. No. They'd want to know what business he had seeing the seven men in the first place. He didn't have much of an answer for that one.

Driving along Woodward Street toward Fourth Avenue Harry was beset with one nagging question. Why had Paula Ralston never brought any of her clients to see him before? He was the dispenser of over a hundred good jobs that offered high salaries. The answer was just as persistent as the question. *Lab Technician was the only security job he handled.* She was determined that one of her men get that job at any cost.

It wasn't a very pleasant thought. Harry didn't want to believe it. He didn't want to believe that Paula Ralston was going to mean trouble for him. And yet he knew that's exactly what she meant.

She was waiting for him at Maria's. She kissed him as he slipped into the booth beside her. Through four drinks and a six-course dinner he watched her smile. That smile could melt down the door on a bank vault. He noticed how she laughed at all of his wisecracks. When it was her turn to talk she talked about him. She offered a toast to their closer friendship, with special emphasis on the word "closer."

But she did not mention the seven men. That was the smart approach, Harry ventured. She'd save that until she got home and slipped into something more comfortable.

He stood alone in Paula's living room nursing a scotch on the

rocks. The night before he had been too concerned about his progress with this latter-day Aphrodite to give a damn about the place she lived in. He glanced around the room. Every inch reeked of success. The furniture was sleek, modern, exquisitely contoured . . . like its owner. There wasn't much question about it, Paula Ralston made a lot more dough than he did. But how? That was the question.

She came out of the bedroom and mixed herself a drink. She was a living dream in a black lace negligee. Transparent. It figured. A lot of things were beginning to figure.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" she asked.

"I didn't think you had any left." He couldn't take his eyes from the negligee.

"I think Mr. Chase and Mr. Boles are the best of the seven. I think they come closest to what you're looking for." She lifted her glass and clinked it against his.

Harry smiled. He wasn't looking at her anymore. It was more of an education to look through her. She was good. Damn good. She could lull you into believing the Grand Canyon was brimming over with silver dollars, all yours for the taking. It was next to impossible to doubt the sincerity in her face.

"I liked all seven of them," he said. "But since you know them better than I do I'll take your recommendation that Chase and Boles are the best."

She moved closer to him. He could feel the warmth of her body.

"We're making some progress, Harry. We've narrowed the field down to two candidates."

Harry kept her maneuvering. "Paula, I'm still faced with the problem of finding a way around the regulations. I can't hire either one of them until I solve that."

Nothing stopped this girl. Nothing even slowed her down. She moved still closer to him. "There's a way around anything if a man has the right incentive to look for it."

He knew what the right incentive was. He didn't have to go looking for that. He laid his drink down, put his arms around her and kissed her. They walked to the sofa. Paula stayed close to him, the ever thoughtful, loving female companion. She rubbed his back and neck and sprinkled him with soft moist kisses. She never mentioned her clients again. And Harry promised to hire one of them the following day.

He was anxious to get back to his apartment to find out if Frank Barnes had called. As he drove back along Woodward Street he couldn't put Paula out of his mind. He already had her character pegged. But what was she up to? What was her goal? She wasn't doing all this for a lousy commission. The stakes were bigger than that.

In a way it was too bad she

was going to have to settle for less than she bargained for. If her seven clients hadn't been so phoney she might have gotten away with it. But why was it necessary for them to be phoney? Why should a girl as shrewd as Paula send seven men in disguise to see . . .

Disguise! Somehow that word threw a different light on the matter. The men had all been disguised in places where hair should grow. They were not bald. There was something abnormal about them. And Harry was ninety percent certain what it was. The answer was incredible. There was still a ten percent margin for error. For Miss Paula Ralston's sake he hoped he was wrong.

Frank Barnes' message was waiting for him at the switchboard in the lobby. The word "urgent" was written on it.

He raced upstairs and picked up the phone. Frank answered on the first ring. He sounded like a man with a gun at his back.

"Harry, what the hell kind of a mess have you gotten yourself into?"

"Why? Something go wrong?"

"You bet your sweet life. An hour after you called me to check on that Ralston dame a guy came into the office and told me to lay off."

Harry was silent. And scared. His answer looked better all the time.

"What did the guy look like?"

"He looked important, Harry.

And he meant business. He had a big bulge in his pocket and he made it very clear I'd be up to my funny bone in hot lead if I relayed any information about this girl to you."

"Frank, was the guy wearing a toupee?"

"A what?"

"A toupee, a hair piece!"

"How the hell should I know. I wasn't interested in his coiffure. He was wearing a black overcoat, he kept his hand on that bulge and he didn't care much for smiling. Harry, you in trouble with this dame?"

"What did you find out about her, Frank?"

"Between the time you called and the time the guy strolled into the office I found out she's only had this Personnel Consultant racket for about three months."

"You didn't learn anything else?"

"After I got warned I decided to wait'll I talked with you."

Harry was silent again. His mind was working.

"Frank, what causes baldness?"

"Baldness! Geez, Harry, you're in a fat mess of trouble and you're worrying about losing your hair?"

"It's important, Frank. I must find out what causes total loss of all hair."

The detective grunted. "Well, let's see, there are three or four diseases I know of. Some people claim it's hereditary. Sometimes a deficiency in the genes . . ."

"Okay, Frank, that's enough."

"What do you want me to do about the girl?"

"Just as the man told you. Lay off. I'll call you tomorrow and let you know what this thing is all about."

He hung up the phone and paced in front of his sofa for several minutes. It was inconceivable that the seven men all had the same disease, the same gene deficiency or the same hereditary shortcomings. So his own answer must be much closer to the truth. He'd have to wait until morning to put it to a test. If he was right he would call Colonel Waters and dump the whole bizarre set-up right into the army's lap where it belonged.

Again he found himself hoping he was not right and more important that Paula Ralston wasn't what he was beginning to think she was.

Miss Conway was already in when Harry arrived at the office. He managed a half smile for her.

"Miss Conway, two of the seven men are coming back this morning and . . ."

"And Mr. Boles is the one who's getting the job."

"Who called you this time?" he asked with exasperation.

"Colonel Waters."

Harry's stomach muscles contracted. "Colonel Waters?"

"That's right. When you were gone yesterday the colonel dropped in to see you. He asked me if you were working on the re-

placement for George Fisher . . . I told him you were right on the job. And I showed him the information sheets you had on all seven men."

"You did what!!"

"And Colonel Waters liked the man named Boles best of all. So I guess when Mr. Boles comes in you can tell him the job is his."

"You nitwit!" he bellowed. "You brainless, knuckleheaded . . ." He stomped into his office, and slammed the door.

It was difficult for him to think clearly. He knew he had to make a move. And fast.

He stood by the window and gazed at the Weapons Development Center across the parade ground. The low gray buildings had a quiet peaceful aura about them. If it weren't for the guards marching in front of the great wire fences anyone might think the place was used for manufacturing canopeners, automobile parts, any one of a thousand harmless products.

But it wasn't. Weapons Development represented a vital link in the country's defense program. He no longer figured they were developing a weapon to counteract Soviet aggression. They were working on something far more important. He was just ninety percent sure of that.

Mr. Boles was the first to arrive. He sat in an easy chair which Harry had moved close to his desk in order to better observe the man.

"Mr. Boles, my secretary tells me Colonel Waters was looking at your qualifications yesterday and was very impressed. I gather from that that the job is yours."

"Thank you, sir."

Harry shoved his chair closer to him. The toupee was intact. So was the mustache.

"Now it'll take the government about two weeks to complete a security check-up."

He could see plainly now that the man was also wearing false eyebrows and had no beard. That did it.

"I understand, sir," Boles replied.

"So all I can tell you at the moment is that you'll be hearing from us as soon as possible." Harry got up thinking the interview was over.

Mr. Boles remained seated.

"Miss Ralston would like to see you, Mr. Payne."

"Oh, yes," Harry chuckled, "I'm going to see her this evening."

"She wants to see you now."

"Afraid I can't make it right now. I have a pile of work to do. Besides I'm expecting another client of hers. Have to let him know he didn't get the job."

"Mr. Chase is waiting for us downstairs in the car. You will come with me, Mr. Payne." The order was clear and firm.

Harry didn't like it. "I don't get it. What's so important that Miss Ralston has to see me . . ."

He stopped at the sight of the gun leveled at his chest.

"When we pass your secretary's desk, you will tell her you are taking an early lunch. I will return you in an hour if you cooperate."

Harry Payne knew better than to argue.

Mr. Chase was seated behind the wheel of a blue sedan. Boles and Harry climbed into the back seat. They drove away from Fort Dickson toward the city.

The two men remained silent during the trip. Harry had plenty of time to think. Why this sudden move of Paula's? He must have done something to motivate it. But what?

The only person he had talked to was Frank Barnes and he hadn't divulged anything to him. She couldn't be sore because he had asked Frank to check on her. Routine investigation was part of his job. She knew that. He failed to come up with an answer. He was worried. He knew who the seven men were but he didn't know where they came from. It could have been any one of a million different places. Heaven only knew what kind of people they were.

The shades were drawn in Paula's apartment. There was no sign of her. But as soon as Harry entered the room he forgot about her anyway. His gaze rested upon the small, roundish man sitting in the contour chair, the bald man with no eyebrows and no beard.

"Please be seated, Mr. Payne."

The man's tone was soft and courteous.

"Which one are you?" Harry asked.

The man was amused. "I am Mr. Thompson."

"Oh, yeah," said Harry, "you're the one who kept patting your skull. Couldn't you find one that fit you?"

Nobody was amused. Boles and Chase took positions on either side of Thompson. Their faces were drawn and sober. They resembled two bankrupt morticians.

"Where is the body beautiful?" Harry asked. "Or is she no longer the body beautiful?"

"Take a look for yourself." It was Paula's voice. The familiar sultriness was missing.

Harry swung around to see her emerge from the bedroom. "Well, well, well! If it isn't Miss Lonelyhearts. Mind if I ask why I'm here? I mean the gun and all?"

He had to be flippant. It was the only way he knew to conceal the terror he felt in their presence.

She sat beside him on the sofa. "Harry, you've disappointed me. You haven't been playing the game fair and square."

"If you're referring to the private eye I put on you . . ."

"I'm not, Harry. You put him on, we took him off. Those things even themselves out."

Harry shrugged. "Okay, I give up. What did I do wrong?"

"Show him, Mr. Thompson." She lit a cigarette and folded her legs under her.

Mr. Thompson reached into his pocket and produced a small object. He tossed it into Harry's lap. Harry examined it.

"Do you recognize it?" Mr. Thompson asked.

"It's a microphone," Harry replied.

"That's just what it is." Paula savagely flung her cigarette to the floor. Her own disguise, the one concealing her true, ruthless self, was gone. Her voice was cold and harsh. "How much do you know, Harry? How much?"

Harry folded his hands, rested his full weight on the arm of the sofa and crossed his legs. "How much is it worth to you?"

Paula's hand struck with fury across his face. His cheek went numb. Blood ran from an uneven gash left by the diamond in her ring. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed at the wound.

"You're real high class, aren't you, Paula? They don't make traitors as high class as you anymore."

She raised her hand and aimed for the other cheek. Thompson bolted out of his chair and grabbed her.

"I suggest you have a drink, Miss Ralston. Let us handle the rest."

Paula was furious. "He's not going to tell you anymore . . ."

"We'll handle the rest!!"

Thompson didn't raise his voice. But there was a firmness, a deadly conviction in his inflection. Paula went for a drink.

Harry didn't like that. Paula

had a temper. He could deal with her. But the others . . . they displayed very little emotion. He had no idea how to handle them.

Thompson sat down again facing Harry.

"The fact is," he began gracefully, "we discovered this microphone and four others like it here in Miss Ralston's apartment. One in each room. Now we are very cautious people, Mr. Payne. We are quite certain no one knows our whereabouts. It is logical then that the microphones have not been here long. Miss Ralston's only visitors are ourselves and you. You have known her two days. So you are the only person who knows this apartment well enough to have planted these tell-tale devices in a hurry."

"Why should I want to plant them?"

"You took the trouble to have Miss Ralston investigated. But more than one means of investigation produces better results. The microphones were wired to a small radio which we located in the basement of this building. We have assumed that everything spoken into them was transmitted over the radio and recorded at your end. That makes sense, doesn't it?"

Harry was confused. "So far, so good."

"We want those recordings, Mr. Payne."

They seemed to be convinced the microphones were his. Only Harry knew it wasn't true. But to admit it might mean he

wouldn't leave Paula's place alive. He derived no comfort from the knowledge that someone else was interested in Paula's activities. That wasn't helping him with his problem of the moment. He could see no clear way out. He had to keep stalling. And as long as they were so sure of themselves it might even be to his advantage to maintain a certain arrogance.

I might as well tell you, Thompson, I have no intention of cooperating until I know a few facts about you and your friends. Like who you are, where you're from, what you're after . . ."

"It is not necessary, in order to tell us where the recordings are," smiled Mr. Thompson, "that you know anything more about us."

"It isn't necessary," said Harry, "but I want to know."

Thase started to voice an objection but Harry broke in.

"And don't tell me you have more persuasive ways of making me talk. You can use force but it'll take time. Your time is valuable or you wouldn't have hustled me over here as fast as you did. So let's *not* waste your time. You tell me, then I'll tell you."

Thompson glanced at his two compatriots. Their faces registered dissatisfaction. Their silence said that Harry was right. Time was valuable. They would follow the path of least resistance.

"Our point of origin," Mr.

Thompson began, "is Correylla, roughly seven-eighths the size of Earth, in the Syrybic Galaxy. It is approximately . . . in your figures . . . seventy-five trillion miles distant."

"Must be quite a trip." Harry tried to be placid.

Mr. Thompson was momentarily amused. "Travel through Time and Space is something we take for granted. The farthest corners of the Universe are ours for the reaching. That is the foremost reason for our visit to your Earth. You might call us Galactic Observers. You see, we already control the twelve inhabited planets in our own Galaxy. And at this time we have no desire to take on any more responsibility than that. But neither do we want interference from another Galaxy . . . such as this one!"

Harry was surprised. "You're giving this world a lot of credit. We've barely moved off the Earth. What makes you think we could cause your people any trouble?"

"By merely projecting yourselves into space you have eliminated the major obstacle to space travel. Remember it took thousands of years for someone on your Earth to discover electricity. But observe the wonders you have accomplished with it in the relatively few years since it was discovered. The same principle applies to your conquest of space. We are not here to do you harm, Mr. Payne. It

~~merely~~ our intention to warn you, when the time comes, of the dangers you face should you decide to venture too far."

"For people who intend no harm I'd say you and your friends are putting on quite an unconvincing show."

"I assure you, Mr. Payne, our visit to Earth was intended purely for observational purposes!"

"What do you mean, *was*?"

Thompson's face was grim. The easy chair that had accommodated his small roundish frame so perfectly now appeared to be uncomfortable for him. A redness crept into his cheeks and spread over his smooth tight scalp.

"The fact is that your government has known about us for six months. Our exact whereabouts has been a well guarded secret . . . but they *were informed* of our presence here on Earth."

"Informed! But who could tell them . . ."

Chase broke in impatiently. "We are wasting time! We must get those recordings!"

The interruption was dismissed with a wave of Thompson's hand.

"Your government was informed by George Fisher."

"George Fisher!" Harry gulped.

"You see, Mr. Fisher . . . that wasn't really his name, you understand . . . was one of us . . . a member of our observation team. After we arrived here . . . well,

you might say he defected, gave your government the benefit of his somewhat limited knowledge."

Harry whistled. "And because of him your mission is no longer observational."

"That remains to be seen."

Harry leaned forward on the sofa. "You have any ideas, Mr. Thompson, about why he defected? I'm curious to know why a man is unhappy enough with his own lot to run away and put himself in the hands of a civilization that is in every way alien to him."

Thompson's answer was brief and deliberately ambiguous. "Mr. Fisher was a traitor. What more can be said of him?"

"So he didn't commit suicide," Harry muttered.

"That's right, Mr. Payne."

"I take it you're not sure of how much Fisher told the government before you got to him."

"Mr. Fisher's limitations were familiar to us. It is the potential of your own scientists now that they have his information that we are most concerned with."

Keep stalling, Harry reminded himself . . . keep speculating, guessing, theorizing, anything for time.

"So you know the project that Weapons Development is working on but you don't know how much progress has been made. And you want to place one of your own people in there to find out."

"Thanks to you, we have succeeded in doing just that."

Thompson smiled with satisfaction, having kept his part of a bargain. "Now about those recordings . . ."

"I'm not through asking questions."

"But I'm through answering them, Mr. Payne. Tell us where the recordings are."

Harry studied the clean smooth surface of Thompson's face. There was a gentleness in his large round eyes. There was also an unfriendliness. Harry had to keep stalling. He knew any answer he gave them would shorten his life expectancy by about thirty-five years.

"You've gotten me into a mess of trouble, Mr. Thompson. I think you owe me a little more. My memory might prove clearer if I knew what was going on at Weapons Development."

Thompson glanced at his two companions. They showed no sign of dissent.

"Very well, Mr. Payne. For some years now our people have been working on a method of reversing the polarity of the atom. We have tried to create an electro-magnetic field which would repel rather than attract. Once we are able to accomplish this we can develop an instrument capable of disturbing the molecular structure of any object in the universe."

"In other words . . ." Harry frowned at him, "a weapon capable of disintegration?"

"Precisely!"

Harry sat there, stunned. A

few moments seemed hardly enough to digest the knowledge that Weapons Development was working on the most incredibly advanced weapon of all time. And Mr. Thompson and company were out to sabotage it. Their people could not afford to allow another world to beat them to the punch. Who controlled this weapon controlled the universe. Stalling the aliens was more important than ever now. He couldn't heighten the danger to his own life. It wasn't worth a lead nickel anyway. If it had been Thompson wouldn't have consented to tell him this much.

Someone else had wired Paula's apartment. It was reasonable to assume it was someone on his side.

"The recordings, please!!" Boles was becoming very impatient.

Harry looked up and found a gun at his head. "The recordings are at my office," he lied.

Thompson walked to the telephone table and brought the instrument to him. "You will call your secretary," he said, "and tell her you have been detained at lunch. You are sending Mr. Chase to pick up the recordings."

Harry glanced around the room. Paula was sulking at the bar near the door. Drowning her conscience, he thought. They must have paid her a fortune to sell out her own people. Boles and Chase both had their guns poised. Thompson picked up the receiver and extended it to him.

There was no way out, no stalling them any longer. To make a break for it would be suicidal. In the state of confusion his mind was in he could think of only one thing to do. When he reached Miss Conway, he would have to warn her somehow—a few desperate words and pray that she would be alert enough to realize he was in trouble and get the information to the authorities.

He took the phone and dialed. He gave the Fort Dickson operator his office extension. He waited. The phone rang. It rang again. Then three more times. Damn that girl! Her coffee breaks were extended vacations!

Finally the phone was picked up. But the voice that answered was male.

"Who is this?" Harry demanded.

The voice replied, "Colonel Waters."

"This is Harry. I'm at Paula Ralston's apartment . . . emergency . . .!"

The three men were on top of him. Chase smashed the butt of his gun across Harry's knuckles. The receiver fell to the floor. Harry let out a pained groan as Boles' gun butt struck him on the temple. Thompson replaced the receiver. Harry was on the floor. He put his hands to his head for protection as Chase savagely kicked at him. His vision blurred but he managed to see that Paula was still at the bar sipping a drink, sadistically enjoying the whole show.

"He's no longer any use to us," Thompson declared. "You may do your job!"

Harry shook his head, fighting to stay conscious. His vision cleared long enough to see Chase and Boles standing over him, their guns pointed at either side of his head.

There was a volley of defending shots. There was smoke, voices, people running in every direction. More gunfire. Glass shattering. Furniture knocked over.

But Harry felt no pain.

When he looked again Chase and Boles were no longer to be seen. He caught a glimpse of Thompson running for another position of cover. A final gunshot brought him to the floor.

Harry struggled to a sitting position. Then he saw Chase and Boles dead on the floor beyond the sofa. Half a dozen soldiers were in the process of subduing a swearing, clawing Paula Ralston.

And in the doorway he saw Miss Conway.

She looked incongruous as hell with a smouldering revolver in her hand. She crossed the room and knelt beside him. She pulled him around to let his head rest on the sofa.

"Harry! Harry," she whined, brushing his hair back. "Do you hurt badly? What did they do to you?"

He tried to get up.

"You stay right where you are, honey." Her voice was soothing and gentle. There was a soft,

compassionate light in her eyes. No longer that dumb stare. She leaned over and kissed him. "There. You're going to be all right."

"What the hell are you doing here?" Harry bellowed.

"Now you just sit back and relax. I'm just doing my job."

"Your jo . . ." A low steady wail rolled off his lips. "Oh, no! Say it isn't so. Tell me I'm really dead. I know I deserve to be."

"I may be the world's lousiest secretary, but I'm considered not bad in the counter-intelligence department."

Harry repeated the wail.

"We were afraid from the time George Fisher turned himself over to the government," she continued, "that his days were numbered. But the longer he remained alive the more apprehensive his people would become. We figured one day they'd make a

wrong move. And that would be their big mistake. Well, their move was to kill George Fisher and try to get one of their own agents into Weapons Development. That meant exposing themselves. It also meant you had to be watched . . . among others. That's where I came in."

"And playing it about as dumb as I've ever seen."

She laughed. "Sounds like I played the part a little too convincingly."

She stood up and helped him to his feet. "You're coming with me."

"Where to? Hey, what are you doing?"

"There's something about this place that I don't like. I'm no sultry brunette, but I'm not a dumb blonde either." She kissed him, then took a last look at Paula's place and led him out the door.

THE END





SHEPHERD OF THE PLANETS

By ALAN MATTOX

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*Renner had a purpose in life. And
the Purpose in Life had Renner.*

THE star ship came out of space drive for the last time, and made its final landing on a scrubby little planet that circled a small and lonely sun. It came to ground gently, with the cushion of a retarder field, on the side of the world where it was night. In the room that would have been known as the bridge on ships of other days, instrument lights glowed softly on Captain Renner's cropped white hair, and upon the planes of his lean,

strong face. Competent fingers touched controls here and there, seeking a response that he knew would not come. He had known this for long enough so that there was no longer any emotional impact in it for him. He shut off the control panel, and stood up.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "that's it. The fuel pack's gone!"

Beeson, the botanist, a rotund little man with a red, unsmiling face, squirmed in his chair.

"The engineers on Earth told

us it would last a lifetime," he pointed out.

"If we were just back on Earth," Thorne, the ship's doctor, said drily, "we could tell them that it doesn't. They could start calculating again."

"But what does it mean?" David asked. He was the youngest member of the crew, signed on as linguist, and librarian to the ship.

"Just that we're stuck here—where ever that is—for good!" Farrow said bitterly.

"You won't have to run engines anymore," Dr. Thorne commented, knowing that remark would irritate Farrow.

Farrow glared at him. His narrow cheekbones and shallow eyes were shadowed by the control room lights. He was good with the engines which were his special charge, but beyond that, he was limited in both sympathy and imagination.

Captain Renner looked from face to face.

"We were lucky to set down safely," he said to them all. "We might have been caught too far out for a landing. It is night now, and I am going to get some rest. Tomorrow we will see what kind of a world this is."

He left the control room, and went down the corridor toward his quarters. The others watched him go. None of them made a move to leave their seats.

"What about the fuel pack?" David asked.

"Just what he said," Farrow

answered him. It's exhausted. Done for! We can run auxiliary equipment for a long time to come, but no more star drive."

"So we just stay here until we're rescued," David said.

"A fine chance for that!" Farrow's voice grew bitter again. "Our captain has landed us out here on the rim of the galaxy where there won't be another ship for a hundred years!"

"I don't understand the man," Beeson said suddenly, looking around him belligerently. "What are we doing out here anyway?"

"Extended Exploration," said Thorne. "It's a form of being put out to pasture. Renner's too old for the Service, but he's still a strong and competent man. So they give him a ship, and a vague assignment, and let him do just about what he wants. There you have it."

He took a cigar from his pocket, and looked at it fondly.

"While they last, gentlemen," he said, holding it up. He snipped the end, and lit it carefully. His own hair had grown grey in the Service, and, in a way, the reason for his assignment to the ship was the same as Renner's.

"I think," he said slowly, "that Captain Renner is looking for something."

"But for what?" Beeson demanded. "He has taken us to every out-of-the-way, backward planet on the rim. And what happens? We land. We find the natives. We are kind to them. We teach them something, and leave them a few supplies. And

then Renner loses interest, and we go on!"

"Perhaps it is for something in himself," David offered.

"Perhaps he will find it here," Thorne murmured. "I'm going to bed."

He got up from his seat.

David stood up, and went over to one of the observation ports. He ran back the radiation screen. The sky outside was very black, and filled with alien stars. He could see absolutely nothing of the landscape about them because of the dark. It was a poor little planet. It hadn't even a moon.

In the morning they opened up the ship, and let down the landing ramps. It was a very old world that they set foot upon. Whatever mountains or hills it had ever had, had long ago been leveled by erosion, so that now there was only a vaguely undulating plain studded with smooth and rounded boulders. The soil underfoot was packed and barren, and there was no vegetation for as far as they could see.

But the climate seemed mild and pleasant, the air warm and dry, with a soft breeze blowing. It was probable that the breeze would be always with them. There were no mountains to interfere with its passage, or alter its gentle play.

Off to one side, a little stream ran crystal clear over rocks and gravel. Dr. Thorne got a sample bottle from the ship, and went over to it. He touched his fingers to the water, and then touched

them to his lips. Then he filled the sample bottle from the stream, and came back with it.

"It seems all right," he said. "I'll run an analysis of it, and let you know as soon as I can."

He took the bottle with him into the ship.

Beeson stood kicking at the ground with the toe of his boot. His head was lowered.

"What do you think of it?" Renner asked.

Beeson shrugged. He knelt down and felt of the earth with his hands. Then he got out a heavy bladed knife and hacked at it until he had pried out a few hard pieces. He stood up again with these in his hands. He tried to crumble them, but they would not crumble. They would only break into bits like sun dried brick.

"It's hard to tell," he said. "There seems to be absolutely no organic material here. I would say that nothing has grown here for a long, long time. Why, I don't know. The lab will tell us something."

Renner nodded.

For the rest of the day they went their separate ways; Renner to his cabin to make the entries that were needed when a flight was ended, even though that ending was not intentional; Beeson to prowling along the edge of the stream and pecking at the soil with a geologist's pick; and Farrow to his narrow little world of engines where he worked at getting ready the

traction machines and other equipment that would be needed.

David set out on a tour of exploration toward the furthermost nests of boulders. It was there that he found the first signs of vegetation. In and around some of the larger groups of rocks, he found mosses and lichens growing. He collected specimens of them to take back with him. It was out there, far from the ship, that he saw the first animate life.

When he returned, it was growing toward evening. He found that the others had brought tables from the ship, and sleeping equipment, and set it up outside. Their own quarters would have been more comfortable, but the ship was always there for their protection, if they needed it, and they were tired of its confinement. It was a luxury to sleep outdoors, even under alien stars.

Someone had brought food from the synthetizer, and arranged it on a table. They were eating when he arrived.

He handed the specimens of moss and lichen to Captain Renner, who looked at them with interest, and then passed them on to Beeson for his study.

"Sir?" David said.

"What is it, David?" Captain Renner asked.

"I think there are natives here," David said. "I believe that I saw one."

Renner's eyes lit up with interest. He laid down his knife and fork.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"It was just a glimpse," David said, "of a hairy face peering around a rock. It looked like one of those pictures of a cave man one used to see in the old texts."

Renner stood up. He moved a little way away, and stood staring out into the growing dark, across the boulder studded plain.

"On a barren planet like this," he said, "they must lack so many things!"

"I'd swear he almost looks happy," Dr. Thorne whispered to the man next to him. It happened to be Farrow.

"Why shouldn't he be?" Farrow growled, his mouth full of food. "He's got him a planet to play with! That's what he's been aiming for—wait and see!"

The next few days passed swiftly. Dr. Thorne found the water from the little stream not only to be potable, but extremely pure.

Farrow got his machinery unloaded and ready to run. Among other things, there was a land vehicle on light caterpillar treads capable of running where there were no roads and carrying a load of several tons. And there was an out and out tractor with multiple attachments.

Beeson was busy in his laboratory working on samples from the soil.

David brought in the one new point that was of interest. He had been out hunting among the boulders again, and it was almost dark when he returned. He told Renner about it at the

supper table, with the others listening in.

"I think the natives eat the lichen," he said.

"I haven't seen much else they could eat," Beeson muttered.

"There's more of the lichen than you might think," David said, "if you know where to look for it. But, even at that, there isn't very much. The thing is, it looks like it's been cropped. It's never touched if the plants are small, or half grown, or very nearly ready. But just as soon as a patch is fully mature, it is stripped bare, and there never seems to be any of it dropped, or left behind, or wasted."

"If that's all they have to live on," Thorne said, "they have it pretty thin!"

The natives began to be seen nearer to the camp. At first there were just glimpses of them, a hairy face or head seen at the edge of a rock, or the sight of a stocky figure dashing from boulder to boulder. As they grew braver they came out more into the open. They kept their distance, and would disappear into the rocks if anyone made a move toward them, but, if no attention was paid them, they moved about freely.

In particular, they would come, each evening, to stand in a ragged line near one of the nests of boulders. From there, they would watch the crewmen eat. There were never more than twelve or fifteen of them, a bandy legged lot, with thick, heavy torsos, and hairy heads.

It was on one of these occasions that Dr. Thorne happened to look up.

"Oh, oh!" he said. "Here it comes!"

Renner turned his head, and rose to his feet. The other men rose with him.

Three of the natives were coming toward the camp. They came along at a swinging trot, a sense of desperation and dedicated purpose in their manner. One ran slightly ahead. The other two followed behind him, shoulder to shoulder.

Farrow reached for a ray gun in a pile of equipment near him, and raised it.

"No weapons!" Captain Renner ordered sharply.

Farrow lowered his arm, but kept the gun in his hand.

The natives drew near enough for their faces to be seen. The leader was casting frightened glances from side to side and ahead of him as he came. The other two stared straight ahead, their faces rigid, their eyes blank with fear.

They came straight to the table. There they reached out suddenly, and caught up all the food that they could carry in their hands, and turned and fled with it in terror into the night.

Somebody sighed in relief.

"Poor devils!" Renner said. "They're hungry!"

There was a conference the following morning around one of the tables.

"We've been here long enough

to settle in," Renner said. "It's time we started in to do something for this planet." He looked toward Beeson. "How far have you gotten?" he asked.

Beeson was, as usual, brisk and direct.

"I can give you the essentials," he said. "I can't tell you the whole story. I don't know it. To be brief, the soil is highly nitrogen deficient, and completely lacking in humus. In a way, the two points tie in together." He looked about him sharply, and then went on. "The nitrates are easily leached from the soil. Without the bacteria that grow around certain roots to fix nitrogen and form new nitrates, the soil was soon depleted.

"As to the complete lack of organic material, I can hazard only a guess. Time, of course. But, back of that, probably the usual history of an overpopulation, and a depleted soil. At the end, perhaps they ate everything, leaves, stems and roots, and returned nothing to the earth."

"The nitrates are replaceable?" Renner asked.

Beeson nodded.

"The nitrates will have formed deposits," he said, "probably near ancient lakes or shallow seas. It shouldn't be too hard to find some."

Renner turned to Farrow.

"How about your department?" he asked.

"I take it we're thinking of farming," Farrow said. "I've got

equipment that will break up the soil for you. And I can throw a dam across the stream for water."

"There are seeds in the ship," Renner said, his eyes lighting with enthusiasm. "We'll start this planet all over again!"

"There's still one thing," Beeson reminded him drily. "Humus! Leaves, roots, organic material! Something to loosen up the soil, aerate it. Nothing will grow in a brick."

Renner stood up. He took a few slow paces, and then stood looking out at the groups of boulders studding the ancient plain.

"I see," he said. "And there's only one place to get it. We'll have to use the lichens and the mosses."

"There'll be trouble with the natives if you do," Thorne said.

Renner looked at him. He frowned thoughtfully.

"You'll be taking their only food," the doctor pointed out.

"We can feed them from the synthetizer," Renner answered. "We know that they will eat it."

"Why bother?" Farrow asked sourly.

Renner turned on him.

"Will the synthetizer handle it?" he asked.

"I guess so," Farrow grumbled. "For awhile, at least. But I don't see what good the natives are to us."

"If we take their food," Renner said, "we're going to feed them. At least until such time as the crops come in, and

they are able to feed themselves?"

"Are you building this planet for us, or for them?" Farrow demanded.

Renner turned away.

They put out cannisters of food for the natives that night. In the morning it was gone. Each evening, someone left food for them near their favorite nest of rocks. The natives took it in the dark, unseen.

Gradually, Captain Renner himself took over the feeding. He seemed to derive a personal satisfaction from it. Gradually, too, the natives began coming out into the open to receive it. Before long, they were waiting for him every evening as he brought them food.

The gathering of the lichen began. They picked it by hand, working singly or in pairs, searching out the rocks and hidden places where it grew. From time to time they would catch glimpses of the natives watching them from a distance. They were careful not to get close.

On one of these occasions, Captain Renner and David were working together.

"Do they have a language?" Captain Renner asked.

"Yes, sir," David answered. "I have heard them talking among themselves."

"Do you suppose you can learn it?" Renner asked. "Do you think you could get near enough to them to listen in?"

"I could try," David offered.

"Then do so," Renner said. "That's an assignment."

Thereafter David went out alone. He found that getting close to the natives was not too difficult. He tried to keep out of their sight, while still getting near enough to them to hear their voices. They were undoubtedly aware of his presence, but, with the feeding, they had lost their fear of the men, and did not seem to care.

Bit by bit he learned their language, starting from a few key roots and sounds. It was a job for which he had been trained.

Time passed rapidly, and the work went on. Captain Renner let his beard grow. It came out white and thick, and he did not bother to trim it. The others, too, became more careless in their dress, each man following his own particular whim. There was no longer need for a taut ship.

Farrow threw a dam across the little stream, and, while the water grew behind it, went on to breaking up the soil with his machines. Beeson searched for nitrate, and found it. He brought a load of it back, and this, together with the moss and lichen, was chopped into the soil. In the end, it was the lichen that was the limiting factor. There was only so much of it, so the size of the plot that they could prepare was small.

"But it's a start," Renner said. "That's all we can hope for this first year. This crop will furnish

more material to be chopped back into the soil. Year by year it will grow until the inhabitants here will have a new world to live in!"

"What do you expect to get out of it?" Farrow asked bitterly.

Renner's eyes glowed with an inner light.

Renner's beard grew with the passing months until it became a luxuriant thing. He let his hair go untrimmed too, so that, with his tall, spare figure, he took on a patriarchal look. And, with the passing months, there came that time which was to be spring for this planet. The first green blades of the new planting showed above the ground.

The natives noticed it with awe, and kept a respectful distance.

That evening, when it was time for the native's feeding, the men gathered about. Little by little the feeding had become a ritual, and they would often go out to watch it. It was always the same. Renner would step forward away from the others a little way, the load of food in his hands. The natives would come to stand before him in their ragged line, their leader a trifle to the front. There they would bow, and begin a chant that had become a part of the ritual with the passing time.

With the first green planting showing, there was a look of deep satisfaction in Renner's eyes as he stepped forward this night. His hair had grown quite long by now, and his white beard blew softly in the constant wind. There was a simple dignity about him as he stood there, his head erect, and looked upon the natives as his children.

The natives began their chant. It became louder.

"Tolava—" they said, and bowed.

As usual, Farrow was nettled.

"What does the man want anyway?" he asked out loud. "To be God?"

Renner could not help but hear him. He did not turn his head.

"David!" he said.

"Sir?" David asked, stepping forward.

"You understand their language now, don't you?" Renner asked.

"Yes, sir," David said.

"Then translate!" Renner ordered. "Out loud, please, so that the others may hear!"

"Tolava—" the natives chanted, bowing.

"Tolava—our father," David said, following the chant. Suddenly he swallowed, and hesitated for a moment. Then he straightened himself, and went sturdily on. "Tolava—our father—who art from the heavens—give us—this day—our bread!"

THE END

SCIENCE AND SUPERMAN: AN INQUIRY

By POUL ANDERSON

Every s-f fan knows and enjoys Poul Anderson's stories. Now the brilliant young writer presents a startling theory in an essay on the development of man . . . You may agree with Anderson's ideas . . . we don't . . . but they are certainly worth thinking about.

THERE is an old saying, which I have used before but cannot resist bringing forth again, to the effect that: "The optimist thinks this is the best of all possible worlds; the pessimist is afraid he's right." It's as applicable to the biological future of the human race as it is to politics and personal relationships.

Since our ancestors, a million or so years ago, were presumably rather apish creatures, it seems natural to extrapolate the curve of their development and predict that our descendants will be very near to gods. It's a fascinating concept, which I've played with myself. Olaf Stapledon, Stanley Weinbaum, and A. E. van Vogt produced science fiction classics on this theme. But I think we're also obliged to take a hard, critical look at the underlying as-

sumptions. If nothing else, such a re-examination often suggests new fictional treatments of an apparently exhausted motif.

We can begin by dismissing any *Homo Superior* born of normal human parents. The three writers I mentioned made some quasi-mystical postulates to justify this in their stories: unity of life and so on. That's legitimate science fiction, of course; it might even, conceivably, be true. But scientific speculation proper must ground itself firmly on what we know. And all our present knowledge denies the possibility of such a birth.

True, there have been some fairly spectacular hereditary abnormalities. One thinks of color-blindness, hemophilia, or the English "porcupine man." On examination these cases turn out

to involve a very few genes, usually a single one. Following such a mutation, the whole genetic complex then readjusts itself often requiring some generations to do so. For example, when industrial melanism* was first observed in the British peppered moth, the dark new variety still had some white spots; now it doesn't. In other words, the mutated characteristic of black coloration was at first only relatively dominant, but has since become almost absolutely so. Incidentally, it's quite unusual for a mutation to be a dominant in any degree.

Man's genetic structure is exceedingly complicated. Something like twenty separate genes are involved in as simple a matter as hair color. (The same genes also participate in other combinations governing other traits.) "Improbable" is hardly the word for all the billions of exactly correct simultaneous alterations which would have to occur at the same instant, to produce a zygote of a new species without throwing the genetic balance hopelessly out of kilter. Water will freeze on a hot stove long before any such thing happens.

And even if a *Homo Superior* embryo should somehow be formed, I doubt very much if it would survive. Its enzyme and hormone systems would be too

different from the mother's. It would probably die and be resorbed before it even got to the fetus stage.

No, unless that "unity of life" really exists—there's no evidence for it, and plenty against it—evolution will have to proceed in man as gradually as in every other genus. The question before the house is, Will it actually do so?

If asked what improvements could be made in our race, we think at once of getting rid of the vermiform appendix. Those who have considered the subject a bit more will advocate some changes in the spine, such as fusing the bottom few vertebrae; and they will ask for a rupture-proof abdomen and properly draining sinuses. Anyone with flat feet can wistfully imagine a stronger arch. The little toe, while harmless, has no real function and would seem fated to disappear; likewise body hair, except the pubic and axillary—even this is sexual display only and could be dispensed with—and the male beard. Beyond gross anatomy, we could use eyes less subject to optical deformation, veins less likely to go varicose on us, arteries which don't harden or blow out. We would like immunity to all diseases, including the mental ones. This latter development presupposes not only a well-adjusted biochemistry, unable to develop those imbalanced which apparently cause schizophrenia, but a nervous system too stable

*In areas where coal dust has blackened the landscape, dark coloration has become advantageous and has actually developed.

for neurosis. Enormous power of intellect's almost a defining quality of the traditional superman. Most people would in addition make him less selfish and predatory than today's humankind.

These and similar traits are straightforward developments from man-as-we-know-him. We can now walk around our *Homo Superior* and hang totally new powers such as telepathy and conscious control of all body functions on him, like ornaments on a Christmas tree. But I do not plan to discuss these. All the arguments that followed will apply equally well to such speculative characteristics.

One small but important objection can be raised at once to our picture of superman. Quite a few of his differences from us are desirable only in the context of our own social and technological culture. The human foot, for example, is perfectly well adapted for walking on soft earth. Hard pavements and badly designed shoes bring on fallen arches, not any inherent deficiency. Arteriosclerosis, some mental disease, and various other forms of breakdown seem to be closely connected with diet, exercise, and/or nervous strain. It would make far more sense to adjust our mode of living than to wait for evolution. And this is doubtless what we will do, albeit unconsciously: for who believes that the present-day form of civilization will last forever?

Certain other goals are just plain impossible, e.g. permanent natural immunity to all diseases. Bacteria and viruses evolve too. After a few years of wonder drugs, we are beginning to see wonder drug-proof germs. Imagine a strain of man suddenly appearing, with metabolism so alien that no existing micro-organism could live in him. How long would it take first one, then two, then many germ species to develop adaptations which would enable them to use this free lunch counter!

We do have many built-in flaws, such as our sinuses, which try to drain straight out of our faces as if we were still quadrupeds. But at this point our own cleverness intervenes. Sanitation makes unnecessary any degree of natural immunity to a host of diseases. Immunization reinforces our inborn defenses against most others. Surgery restores the slipped spinal disc, drains the inflamed cavity, patches up the hernia. And now a chemotherapeutic arsenal is being accumulated, which will doubtless before long cure such maladies as schizophrenia. We shall have more to say later about the role of the doctor; for the time being, the most unimaginative extrapolation of medical progress will show us that there is probably no biological problem which we *must* solve by evolution. True, it would be convenient not to get appendicitis, but it is no longer a question of

life and death. And natural selection works through differential survival—the relative number of descendants which an organism has—not through minor individual afflictions.

Mutatis mutandis, the same argument applies to great muscular strength, hawklike eyes, super-fast reactions, and similar Boy Scout ideals. We have machines (or will have them, in the foreseeable future) which can so far outdo us in all these respects that there is no evolutionary point in our own improvement.

If civilized man is under no pressure to develop much further physically, and therefore apparently will not do so, what about his mental capacity? What use is his brain power to man? It has enabled him to become the supreme animal on Earth . . . at least, outside the microscopic realm. But what competition is left? Only the harshest struggle between individuals, prolonged for many generations, would now give any noticeable advantage to the genius over the average man. (It would also put a premium on innate ruthlessness, so that the eventual superman would be an even meaner cuss than his twentieth century ancestor.) Such highly personal struggles are a rare and short-lived historical phenomenon. It tends to be whole organizations, whole countries, empires, and societies, which clash. Our much-touted American Free Enterprise, to the extent that it has ever existed at

all has involved companies far more than single persons.

Even given a pure anarchy, the strong, intelligent men will quickly gather followers and build up disciplined groups. The superior clan or gang—superior more by virtue of effective organization than gifted individuals—wins out. Historical cases in point include the medieval Icelandic republic and our own hillbillies. And after a relatively short time, a still larger organization (the Norwegian crown, the state government) stepped in and knocked the feudists' heads together.

But will not competition between groups put a premium on brains, if only in the leading classes? Not much of one, I'm afraid. We are also developing artificial supplements to our own intelligence. The oldest of these is probably writing; the abacus and the slide rule are venerable enough; now we have electronic computers, tomorrow we will have Lord knows what. Once again, a battery of specialized tools can do a job better and quicker than slowly evolving flesh. Victory will go to the side with the best robots. Insofar as human qualities are important, in war or less violent conflict, they tend to be courage and steadiness of purpose rather than intellectual complexity.

What about intrasocietal competition? The qualities emphasized by it vary from culture to culture, but in general—almost

by definition—ability at politicking and at sliding between crannies in the rules makes you richer and more powerful than ability to think abstractly. Even the classic Chinese civil service system laid value on memorization rather than originality.

In fact, throughout past history, any victorious organization soon begins to discourage creativity. The people on top are satisfied with the status quo and do their best to freeze it; their underlings slide meekly enough into a groove which offers, at the minimum, status security. If the organization happens to be an empire, it takes outside invasion to destroy the ultimate petrified culture, which otherwise (as in Egypt and China) persists virtually changless for thousands of years.

Seidenberg's *Posthistoric Man* goes so far as to suggest that the world society of the future will, in the course of millennia, destroy first individuality and then consciousness itself. I myself doubt matters will ever get that far. If nothing else, secular changes in climate, soil, etc., will at last force the culture to change, or break it down and thus make room for something new. However, it cannot be denied that there is a strong anti-intellectual tendency in all civilization. There is some reason to think that the average IQ may already be dropping by an estimated ten points per generation. We must come back to this later,

under the general topic of dysgenics.

Civilized man will not be quite static biologically. Certain atrophies can be expected to continue, such as the dwindling of the appendix and the little toe. When an organ is no longer useful, when there is no longer any reason to have it in good shape, then natural selection ceases to operate on it, ceases to weed out the occasional bad mutations. The organ accumulates these, gets progressively more degenerate, and finally vanishes. Medicine will hasten this day by saving those people with really bad appendices, who would otherwise not have survived to reproduce. But apart from such minor clearing up of unfinished business, I don't see evolution doing much to improve civilized humanity.

To be sure, nowadays it may seem a rather big assumption that civilization will endure. If it doesn't, if we all go back to the primitive and stay there, then I suppose we can look for radical, if gradual, development of our bodies, along the lines already discussed. I doubt, though, if our brains would evolve much further: even the crudest savages have enough intelligence to cope with any foreseeable wild beasts or change of climate.

Thus we seem to have a choice of retaining our scientific culture-basis, and—at best—improving very little biologically; or going back to the woods and developing some truly fine bi-

pedal bodies, but no particularly dazzling intellects.

Wait, objects a Shavian in the audience. You haven't said a thing about the third possibility. Let's keep our machines, but breed our own supermen.

The first retort to that proposal is: Why? We have already shown that scientific man doesn't really need to evolve. A glance at the current headlines may provoke you into saying we could use some brains. But it isn't our intellects which have failed us today; hydrogen warhead missiles and strategic analyses are tremendous intellectual achievements. It's our attitudes, our culture if you like, which are at fault, and this is not in the province of biological evolution.

Now it would certainly be nice to have well-designed sinuses and so on. (The reader will have deduced that I live on a sea-coast.) It might be even nicer to have an IQ of 400, if such a number means anything. . . . Or would it? The work of Renshaw and others, not to mention traditional Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist disciplines, have proven we're nowhere near realizing our existing potentialities, either physical or mental. It makes no sense to tinker with our structure until we know its limitations—and these we have not yet touched.

Furthermore, I would rather have a few aches and scars, even a shorter life, and my civil liberties, than the essentially totali-

tarian existence required by any of these man-breeding schemes. You need only sketch out a few of the compulsions involved to see what I mean.

Then there's the fact that we don't have enough knowledge or wisdom to undertake such a project. We have bred plenty of species for this or that set of characteristics, often with great exactitude. The typical result has been a freak unable to survive except with elaborate human care: a cabbage, a pouter pigeon, a Holstein cow. Some of the less thoroughly bred animals can go wild successfully, but then they take only a few generations to shed their human-imposed traits and revert to the efficient form of dingo, alley cat, mustang, razorback. I doubt very much if we'd have better luck breeding for, say, high intellect. We'd probably get an inferior sort of computer, devoid of vigor and emotional warmth. I have already pointed out that genes seem to operate in complexes, rather than singly; their delicate balance is not lightly to be tampered with.

Finally, even granting us a perfect knowledge of genetics, an ability to design any sort of man we want and make him viable, there's still the question of what we do want. It seems all too likely to me that the artificially created "superman" would be a monster tailored to an ideology. He might be too gentle to fight—and therefore too effete to

explore, create, and reform. He might represent the attainment of the obscene Soviet goal, men with an instinctive need to work for society. Where I come from, we call 'em ants.

It seems to me that true conservatism, as opposed to reaction, consists in the belief that one man, or one generation, can at best make only a small contribution to the accumulated wisdom of the race. If we expand this idea to mean the biological experience of a billion years, we will be cautious about all these eugenic schemes. We will even be cautious about plans at some future date, to knock undesirable genes right out of the germ plasm. I suppose there is no objection to eliminating the appendix and similar minor improvements, intended merely to strengthen the humanness we already possess. Even this is only worthwhile if it can be done without regimenting individuals. And beyond this, we can too easily get ourselves in trouble.

The foregoing arguments refer only to the positive side of eugenics. There is a negative aspect, far more serious and urgent, which is already with us. I refer to species degeneration.

Mutation (which will go on at an increased rate in the future, thanks to our recklessness with radiations) is nearly always for the worse rather than the better. There are far more ways for such a random process to do things wrong than to do them right. Until fairly recently, the

most disastrous results of this were kept out of the race. The victims died early, or they were sterile, or if they reproduced it was at a much lower rate than the healthy norm. But nowdays our civilization has to some extent eliminated natural selection. I have said that men don't need to become any faster or stronger than they are; but under modern conditions, if these outlast the Atomic Age, men don't even need to be that good. A slow, ill-coordinated, dim-witted oaf, who wouldn't have lasted ten years in a forest unless some normal man took him on as a slave, can now become a television executive.

Still more insidious and important are the effects of medicine. The child who gets an old man's illness like cancer can be saved—to pass on his defect. The sterile woman can undergo operations to create fertility—and how many of her descendants will need the same operation? Soon the man who goes insane under moderate pressure will be returned to society, with a bottle of pills to make him as good as new. Eventually, no doubt, even the congenital idiot can be propped up with chemicals; this has already been done in the case of cretinism.

I have sketched out the process by which organs and functions, no longer needed for survival, will degenerate and atrophy. It works just the same for strength, resistance, and in-

telligence. Lately some children, inoculated against diphtheria, have been getting the disease anyway: they come from an extremely susceptible line, which without vaccination would never have lasted long enough to develop its susceptibility to the present degree.

I say nothing against the doctor who repairs the damage of accident and war. If anything, this favors the race, since strong and active people are probably slightly more exposed to such injuries. Nor do I object to ordinary sanitation, since this only restores a sparseness of pathogens which has always marked unruined nature. But if we keep on supplying our hereditarily unfit with artificial aids, and then turning them loose to breed, at last the entire species will need such help . . . and be as sickly, crippled, and defective as ever in its past. If then that elaborate, overwhelmingly expensive medical system breaks down, humanity will be *kaput*. This consequence of simple genetic law is no more equivocal than any engineering prediction.

The answer is not the murder of the unfit, nor the denial of care to them, but their sterilization: a quick and painless procedure which does no harm to the sexual function. It may seem an infringement of their rights; but if we can put typhoid carriers under certain mild restrictions, why not the carriers of childhood cancer?

Various compensations, such as money, could be granted these unfortunates. As a matter of fact, some foreign countries and American states do have laws governing certain cases, chiefly mental deficiency. We need only expand the precedent.

It will, of course, be a knotty problem to define "unfitness." I would say that those are unfit who develop certain diseases and defects prior to the age of about forty. (What happens afterward makes no evolutionary difference, since nearly everyone has finished reproducing by then.) What these troubles are, though, is a somewhat open question. Hemophilia, yes; but bad teeth? And if so, how bad? I suggest that the basic criterion be: "Would this person have a reasonable chance of surviving and reproducing to the age of forty, under more or less 'natural' conditions?"

Inevitably, a degree of arbitrariness remains. "Art, like morality," said G. K. Chesterton, "consists in drawing the line somewhere." The important thing is that we do draw a reasonable line. We needn't do it at once; but neither can we wait many more centuries.

The evolutionary prospect for man is, I think, one of rather small change for the better, provided that he does not realize his all too great chances for degeneration. What we do now to avert the latter seems a good test of our worthiness for the former, a million years hence. **THE END**

COMPLETE
BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

SNEAK PREVIEW

By ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATED by FINLAY

CHAPTER 1

THE swallow was scarcely more than a fledgling. It had flown up from Sanjancapistrano, and now it was approaching the Laguna Dome.

No Shelley hailed its blithe spirit as the bird spiralled slowly down towards the community nestled between the ocean and the hills. The swallow noted, without comprehension, the hilltop houses and the oxygenerators on the peaks. It circled lower, over the scholasticity, the industriosity, the consumemarkets and the outlying farmareas, all powered by the atomic plant from distant Longbeach.



The memory of the film



clips was still fresh in Graham's mind as he fired on Sigmund.

None of this interested the swallow. It was searching for something else—something it had not seen during the long flight between Sanjancapistrano and here.

Life.

That's what the swallow was looking for. Some sign of life, of sentience. Avian, animal, even human life would suffice: the swallow was lost in a great loneliness. Ever since leaving its nest it had been alone, and only instinctual hunger had sent it on the long, solitary flight in search of fellow-beings. The bird had flown over empty ocean and equally empty land—flown emptily, endlessly, impelled by a need to seek out a living thing from the vast wastes of sand and rock.

The swallow had seen other cities en route, or their remains: skeleton cities, corpse-cities, and bits of disarticulated white bone that had once been connected into roads. But there had been no life.

And now life was at hand. Five thousand feet below, the bird caught glimpses of movement in the city streets. The living creatures were alien—what did the swallow know of humans?—but they were undoubtedly alive. And life called out to life, in wild welcome.

The swallow glided down, circling to dive. Fortunately, it hesitated before actually diving. Thus it was that only its wings struck the plexide transparency of the Dome.

The invisible barrier did not reflect; it merely rejected. The swallow pecked at it vainly, but nothing happened. The Dome remained, inviolate.

So the swallow rose, spiralled again, and descended at a distance. Once more the Dome deflected it. The bird could see life passing below, oblivious to every frantic effort at entry. Time after time the swallow circled and swooped, but wherever it went the Dome was there.

Finally dusk came. The bird, exhausted, circled in the radioactive air, then turned its three eyes to the southern sunset and fluttered away.

It couldn't get inside the Dome.

On the other hand, those inside the Dome couldn't get out . . .

CHAPTER 2

INSIDE the Dome, in one of the hilltop houses, Graham waited. Palms perspiring, the dark-haired young man adjusted his glasses and then reached for the controls.

He stared into the blackness of the room before him, then blinked at the sudden light. His companion coughed nervously.

Suddenly the plain came into view—the sweeping stretch of sunlit sand beside the sea. Far in the distance a black dot moved. Swiftly it approached, transforming as it neared into the familiar combination of a manicycle and rider.

The manicycle was a standard model, complete with smasher before and rakers behind, but its rider was not garbed for combat. Instead he wore the conventional black uniform and crash-helmet, without covering armor. Through the plexide bubble his features were plainly visible as he ground to a halt and dismounted. And it was then that both Graham and his companion could note, upon closer scrutiny, that *he* was *she*—an attractive young blonde.

"Switch," Graham murmured.

His companion grunted.

Boots scuffing sand, the uniformed blonde reached into the saddle-pouch and withdrew a pennant which she staked upright in the center of the plain. She stood there for a moment, then raised her right arm in a signal before returning to the manicycle. Mounting the machine once more, she waited.

Now attention moved again to the far horizon. Two dots this time, approaching still more rapidly than the manicycle had moved.

Within a matter of moments, the dots were rushing into the foreground, easily recognizable for what they were.

The enclosed, armored vehicle with the eight-foot spikes jutting from the bumper was obviously a Cad. And the lowslung open job with the battering-rod extending along the side of the hood was just as obviously a Jag.

Behind the controls of each were the drivers, in full armor.

The young man in the Jag smiled and waved at the Cad driver, who scowled in return. Then both of them glanced at the girl as she signalled.

Side by side the two cars rolled abreast of the pennant in the sand, clicking fenders in the ceremonial gesture. Then the Jag backed away and the Cad turned, backing in reverse. When each car was a hundred yards away from the pennant marker, the girl raised her right arm again.

And so the duel began.

The Cad thundered down the sand, shifting from third to fourth in a matter of seconds as it sought its prey. Six thousand pounds of armored might thrust forward, impelling the spikes toward the oncoming Jag.

The smaller car made no effort to swerve. It too came on at top speed, moving so swiftly it almost blurred. Suddenly its driver switched controls, moving the Jag out in a growing arc. At the same time the battering-rod telescoped past the hood as the extension went into play, and smashed the left fender of the Cad as the two cars passed one another with only inches separating them.

"Tournament style," Graham whispered. "Watch, now!"

Both cars wheeled and returned, scarcely slackening speed. Again the Cad hurtled forward, again the Jag dodged. But this time the driver of the Cad had anticipated the feint.

He countered with a side-swipe and the spikes on his hood dug squarely into the side of the Jag, almost rolling it over. The driver of the Jag huddled to one side as the righthand door came off, armor and all.

Not giving him time to recover, the Cad halted just ahead and quickly reversed. And now the rippers on the rear-fenders went into play, heading for the vulnerable hood of the floundering Jag. Just in time the driver switched on the exhaust-discharge, and lost himself, squid-fashion, in a murky cloud.

The Cad backed into the cloud, seeking its prey blindly. But the Jag swooped to one side, then described a quick arc. The Cad came out of the cloud, still in reverse, its driver blinded by the smoke. And the Jag was ready. It drove forward, hitting the Cad squarely in the side. At the same time the battering-rod swung around on a moveable extension and struck the windshield, ploughing through until it sheared the top off the heavier machine in a single vicious side-swipe.

The Cad's driver sat there in the arrested vehicle, bowing as if in appreciation. It was a grotesque bow, because the same blow that struck windshield and top had sheared off the top of his skull.

The driver of the Jag grinned and glanced at the girl. There was no need to formally acknowledge the victory—already she had removed her crashhel-

met and was divesting herself of the black uniform. Still grinning, the Jag driver stepped out of his vehicle, ready to claim his reward. Now was the time to—

"Turn that bombed thing off!"

Graham glanced at his companion, then shrugged and reached for the switch. The scene faded away, the two screens rose and retracted into the ceiling, and the normal flow of fluorescence returned to the projection room.

"Sorry," Graham murmured. "I know it's hard to get the full effect without the sensories. The tracks are still in processing, and they're beauties — particularly the audio and the olfac. But I thought you could at least get some idea from the video."

"I got an idea, all right, sweetheart." The other man rose from the posture-chair, his checkered robe fluttering in indignant accompaniment to his waving arms. "Great Godfrey—who authorized this?"

"It's my treatment," Graham told him. "Knocked it out in my spare time, and it cost next to nothing, so don't worry."

"I don't give a bomb about time and cost, lover-boy," said the man in the checkered robe. "What I want to know is why you did it in the first place. Trying to give a break to that blonde saddle-partner or something?"

"Please, Zank," Graham answered. "I scarcely know the girl. That wasn't my intention

at all. It's just that I've always wanted to try my hand at a Realie for a change."

"Realie!" Zank was so excited he removed his checker-framed glasses. "How often I got to tell you we *got* a Realie Department already in operation?"

"I know. But I thought this might be a bit different—"

"Different! I'll say it's different! You think we'd ever release something showing a duel? You know better!"

"But people *do* duel, you know. At least, the Technos do. I tried to make it look authentic. Everything about it is true."

"Darling!" Zank used the traditional phrase sneeringly. "Since when has truth got anything to do with Realies?" He wiped his glistening forehead with a checkered sleeve. "Realies are for Public Information. You know that."

"But why can't we do something different once in a while? Maybe just for a selected audience?"

"Because that's not our job." Zank shook his head. "Listen, Graham. Let me remind you that you're writing for the Space Opera Division. You've got one job, and that's to please your immediate superior—me. And if you want to please me, you'll stick to one plot—Bem meets Fem. That's all."

"I know," Graham sighed. "Only I get sick of it, doing the same old thing again and again. Telling the same old story. Space-travel is dangerous. Other

worlds are filled with danger and evil. And so forth."

"And so on," Zank added. "You forget, it serves a purpose. Violence is outlawed here on Earth. We can't show killings and torture and antisocial aggression. So we switch to other planets, transfer the aggressive tendencies from men to the Bug-Eyed Monster. And at the same time, punch home the idea that it's better not to meddle with space-flight. What's the matter, sweetheart, don't tell me you've forgotten the basics?"

"How could I forget?" Graham replied. "That's all I've been hearing since I went to work. Space Operas are an important adjunct of social conditioning. The hero must be dark, the heroine must be blonde, the monster must be green and the plot must be—"

This time it was a look rather than a word from Zank that halted him. The little producer smiled at him oddly.

"What's that again, lover?" he murmured. "Do my ears deceive me or are you sounding off like one of those lousy radical politicians? Where'd you pick up that kind of talk, anyway—you got ancestors in the GOP, maybe?"

In spite of himself, Graham paled. Biting his lip, he forced his features into a placating smile.

"Sorry," he said. "Guess I'm a little bit tired."

But Zank continued to grin.

"What from?" he asked. "Reading books, perhaps?"

Graham shook his head hastily. "You know better than that, Zank," he protested. "Why, I've never even *seen* a book. Not a real one, that is. Of course, you understand we Talents have access to microfilms. But the stuff is all selected and approved. I'm not political, Zank, not at all. How could I be cleared for a job like this if anyone thought so?"

Zank's grin relaxed a trifle. He sat down again. Abruptly his voice softened. "How old are you, Graham?"

"Twenty-five."

"And you've been with Space Opera for four years, that right?"

"Four years this August."

"Hmmm." Zank clasped his hands together and wriggled his fingers. "I'm forty-four, myself. Got just six years left before I'm Socially Secured. You'd think if anyone wanted to play rebel, I'd be a logical candidate. Not a youngster like you, with half your active life still ahead."

"Half an active life? Twenty-five more years of writing about technicolor tentacles reaching for three-dimensional bosoms?" Graham frowned. "I'm a Talent, Zank. You don't understand what that means, do you? It means I want to express myself."

"I do understand, darling." There was no sarcasm in the producer's voice now. "I'm half-Talent myself, on my mother's side. You didn't know that, did

you? Well, it's true. She was in Sadies, big operator in the designing department back East. Plastic stuff—like those old-time what-do-you-call-'em, sculptors, I guess. Did some pretty important things, too. I understand she was the first one to come out with the bleeding dummy models. By the time I was born she was in charge of the whole Eastern Division. And then she got ideas."

Zank paused and wiped his forehead again. "Of course all this is hearsay, because I never saw her—my father was a Techno, and it was just a one-year mating arrangement. But I heard about it from him later. He'd sort of kept track of my mother afterwards, when she went in for free-lance matings. For a while there I guess she changed mates about once a week, but that didn't help. She was headed the wrong way. She wanted some variety in her work, too. Had the same ideas about Realies you seem to be taking up now, only in her case of course she was working with dummies instead of emotion-pictures. Finally she by-passed authorization and installed some new models in the Sadies at Nework. Psychos."

Graham sat up straight. "Psychos?"

"You heard me. Psychos, robes and all, complete with scream-tracks. Claimed the best way for customers to work off aggression would be to carve up facsimiles of Authority." Zank

sighed. "Naturally, they quashed that idea in a hurry."

"What happened to your mother?"

Zank sighed again, and shrugged. "What could happen?" he said. "They sent her back to the Womb."

"I'm—I'm sorry."

"Well, don't be. Be glad, instead. Glad I told you, gave you an example. Because that's what happens to Talents who decide they've got to express themselves. They think they're heading in a new direction, but they always end up in the same place. Back to the Womb. You don't want that to happen, do you, sweetheart?"

"No." Graham repressed a shudder. Suddenly he reached over and patted his superior on the shoulder. "Look, Zank, I'm sorry about all this. I had no right to experiment. And no reason to talk the way I did. I'm just a bit tired, that's all."

"Maybe you need a rest." Zank stared at him. "How long since you've been to a Psycho for a checkup?"

"There's nothing wrong with me, really there isn't," Graham said, hastily. "I'll snap out of it. All I need is a little hard work to get back into the old routine. Matter of fact, I've been readying a script you're going to like —this one has a real switch, an invisible Bem, you can only see it when it drinks blood and the blood brings its outline into view—"

"Great idea," Zank said. "You

can tell me all about it when you come back."

"Back? But I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh yes you are." The producer smiled. "I've made up my mind. What you need to pick you up right now is a good week of relaxation. I'm authorizing you for an immediate Fornivacation." He delved into the folds of his checkered robe and pulled out a small black photoviewer. "Got just the partner for you, too. See this blonde here? 3-D doesn't do her justice; you need 4-D for that. Her name's Wanda. You're going to like her."

CHAPTER 3

IT WAS difficult not to like Wanda. She was every bit as blonde and beautiful as Zank had claimed.

Graham told her so, the very first night in his apartment.

"I can't understand why you aren't in emotion pictures," he confessed.

"As a Bem?" She smiled up at him.

"You know what I mean."

"I like this better."

Graham frowned. "Really? All these strange men, week after week—"

"Don't be so medieval, darling. There's nothing strange about men, actually. Of course you're different."

Now it was Graham's turn to smile. "Do they teach you what to say in school?"

"They taught me everything

in school. It might interest you to know I have my Mistress's Degree in Erotology. Want to see my diploma?"

"Quite unnecessary. I'm well satisfied with your credentials."

"Then why are you sitting so far away from me?" the girl demanded. "Did I do something wrong? Didn't you like the dinner I ordered?"

"Certainly. You order dinner perfectly." Graham regarded her gravely. "You're perfect, all anyone could reasonably ask for. But maybe I'm not the reasonable type."

"Well, why didn't you say so? Do you want to beat me? Are you a fetishist? Would you like to—"

"No, nothing of the sort. It's just that I think I'd rather talk."

"Talk?" Wanda's eyes flickered momentarily, then opened wider. "Have you had a checkup lately?"

Graham shook his head. "Zank asked me that, this afternoon. Everybody asks, the moment they recognize a departure from the standard response-patterns. Why?"

"Well, isn't that what checkups are for, lover? I mean, we can depend on the Psychos to help us adjust."

"Bomb the Psychos!"

Wanda's mouth was an oval of astonishment.

"Don't look shocked," Graham said. "You forget that I'm a Talent. I've only been orient-

ed, not conditioned. To me a Psycho is just another man, not a Father-Image."

"But surely you don't question the benefits of adjustment?"

"Of course I do. That's part of a Talent's job—to question. We're brought up that way. Everybody else gets hypnotherapy from birth, but not the Talents. We're not supposed to have any checks on creative imagination. We're allowed to doubt if we want to."

"What is there to doubt?"

Graham sighed. "You've been conditioned, you wouldn't understand. It's just that I see things differently."

"For instance?"

The young man stared at her. "Well, you, for example. I sit here looking at you across the room and where most men would see something perfectly normal—a beautiful naked girl wearing glasses—I don't have the usual response. I keep wondering why you don't take the glasses off, or at least wear contact lenses."

"Contact lenses?"

"I learned about them on the microfilms. They were used in the past. Don't be afraid—Talents are encouraged to scan, you know."

"But everybody wears glasses, always. Everybody is myopic."

"Perhaps. The Psychos claim that's so, and nobody has ever questioned it, any more than they question the need for universal infant-appendectomy. But

I wonder if it isn't all part of the pattern of making everyone look alike, dress alike, think alike. Giving everybody his little scar, his little ocular badge. Conditioning the child to seeking security from the Psychos. Once you accept the knife, accept the visual aid, you're well on the way to accepting anything they impose on you. You don't question what the Psychos do and you don't question what you see through the glasses they've given you to wear."

"You sound disturbed."

"I am disturbed." Graham laughed, "That's why Zank gave me this Fornivacation, remember?"

"Yes. And you're not going to spend it sitting in a posture-chair discussing glasses, either." Wanda rose and went over to the accommodation-shelf. She found her kit, fumbled in it, then turned and extended a pill.

"Here, take this," she commanded.

"What is it?"

"Libidose, of course."

"But I don't want—"

She looked at him, genuine pleading in her eyes. He forced a smile as he gazed down at her. "Guess I'm thoughtless to upset you like this." He reached for the pill, then hesitated. "If I swallow this, will you do something for me?"

"Anything."

"Will you take off your glasses?"

Wanda nodded and her hand moved to her eyes. "Better?"

"Much better."

"But wait—you didn't take your pill."

"Now I don't need a pill."

There was no more talk of pills, or anything else, the remainder of the evening. And the next day Graham was quiet and obliging. After the breakfast order came up on the dispenser they took the vator down to the level beneath the hilltop and Graham piloted his 'copter to the beach area.

Here they undressed and for a few hours relaxed in the filtered water pumped from the subterranea of what had once been the ocean's floor—before the Dome's installation.

Far out on the horizon, beyond the rounded transparency of the Dome, they could see the actual ocean, with its tumbling waves. If they listened closely they could almost hear the roar of the gray fury.

"Ever been out of the Dome?" Graham asked.

"Of course. It's my job to travel."

"I mean, on your own."

"Don't be ridiculous." Wanda's eyes narrowed. "Have you?"

Graham shook his head. "No, but I've often wondered. What would it be like, for example, to take an old-fashioned boat and go sailing off on that ocean out there?"

"I've sailed," Wanda confessed. "Just in a jetsub, of course. I went out on a Forni-

vacation with a very important man, to the Island."

"What Island?"

"Up north a ways. You can see it on a clear day—Catatonia Island. It's a Psycho resort, off Longbeach."

"But that's Domed too, I suppose?"

"Certainly. Isn't everyplace?"

"Not from what I've heard. There can't be more than three thousand Domes in the entire continent. That leaves millions of square miles open all over the world. What would it be like to get out there, breathe unfiltered air, feel unfiltered sunlight?"

"Are you forgetting the radioactivity?" Wanda asked.

"How could I forget it? Don't we get an Official Geiger Count every day?"

"They say in another generation it may be safe to abandon the Domes."

"They say," Graham stood up, brushing the sand from his body. "They say, and they report, and we take their word for it. But I've scanned plenty of radiation data. And it's my belief we could open the Domes right now. Next time you jet off on a trip, take a look at the countryside before you're launched. It looks green and clean enough to me. My father told me that years ago."

"Your father!" Wanda rose and put her hand on his shoulder. "You knew him?"

"Of course. Didn't I say we Talents had a different kind of training? He lived with me until he was Socially Secured, four

years ago. I was never put in a Big Family Unit like the rest of you."

He gestured and his movement indicated the figures on the beach area around them—the dozens of lolling and reclining figures, individual in their nudity but identical in their eyeglass badges, their closecropped hair, their youthfulness.

"Let's get out of here," Graham said.

Wanda shrugged, nodded, rose. They walked toward the 'copter.

"Is your father the one who gave you all these ideas?" she asked.

"Perhaps. He was a great Talent, Wanda. Perhaps the greatest here on the Coast. Ever hear of Lewis?"

"Lewis? The one who worked with the Technos to perfect the double screen for solid-view illusion?"

Graham raised an eyebrow. "Where did you pick that up?"

"Oh, I spent a week with a high-ranking Techno once, up near Sanfran. He told me all about it. So Lewis was your father?"

"Was and is. I still hear from him on the vox-box hookup once a week."

"Do you ever talk to him about your opinions?"

"I used to." Graham ushered Wanda into the 'copter, set the controls, and ascended to speed-zone. "But he's changed since he went South. He never should have been Socially Secured in the

first place. They promised to re-classify him as a Techno because of his work on the double screen. That's what he wanted. Then something happened, I don't know what, and he wouldn't tell me. He got his Greetings and was assigned to a place called Gulfport."

"That's one of the best, I hear. Beautiful country down there," Wanda murmured.

"Too beautiful, maybe. It did something to him. He doesn't sound like the same man. Whenever I say something, he tells me to see Warner—that's the Psycho Supervisor for our Talent Section, in Space Opera."

"Good man."

"You know about him, too?"

"Heard of him."

Graham glanced at her as they landed at the foot of the hill. They took the vator up into the building. "But why are you so interested in my problems, all of a sudden?"

"Because I'm interested in you."

"That's very flattering." Graham grinned. As they entered his apartment Wanda took his hand and guided him across the living room.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"In there."

Graham shook his head and drew back.

"What's the matter?" Wanda asked. "Another mood?"

"I feel like thinking."

Wanda pouted. "Thinking!"

Talking! What you need is some relaxation." She brightened. "Maybe we ought to go out tonight. There's something special at the Playdium. Middleweight championship slashing match. Sounds exciting."

"I never got any euphoria out of watching two people cut each other up with sabres."

"How about some culture, then? The symph's in town. With that new Talent, Kovac. They're playing his *Psychiatric Suite* and the *Melancholia and Fugue*."

"Quit trying to entertain me, Wanda. I'm worried."

"What about?"

"I got a funny idea, back there on the beach." He walked across the room and opened the wall service-slot. "I'm going to see if I can clear an emergency vox-box hookup with my father."

"What on earth for?"

Graham paused. "I'm not sure if I ought to talk to you about these things."

"Please, go on. I want to hear. I'm interested."

"Why?"

"You ought to know the answer to that, after last night."

"You mean you're—serious?"

"I took off my glasses for you, didn't I?" The girl moved close to him. "Tell me. Why do you want to call your father?"

He gazed down at her and there was pain in his eyes, and speculation. "It just occurred to me there might be an explanation of why he sounds different. Maybe they didn't leave him

alone when he got down there. Maybe the Psychos did a laundry job on him. Even a prefrontal or a *topectomy*?"

"But that's absurd!"

"Is it? Look, Wanda, I seldom get outside or meet anyone except Talents like myself. I don't think ordinary workers are permitted anything like these weekly vox-box hookups—why should they, when their parents mean nothing to them anyway? But here in this building, there are plenty of other Talents, all with the same arrangement. Once a week they're permitted to call their fathers or their mothers in the South.

"I've never really thought about it before, but now that the idea hits me, I remember remarks my Talent friends have made, about *their* parents sounding different to them. And I remember some of those parents—my father's friends—before they were Socially Secured in the South. A lot of them seemed to share his views, talk the way he did. And yet now the reports I get of their conversations are just like mine. Everyone is happy, everyone is contented, everyone is adjusted."

"Why not?" Wanda asked. "They're Socially Secured. No more problems, just peace and plenty. Who wouldn't relax?"

"My father wouldn't. He faced his problems, taught me to face mine. He'd never urge me to conform this way. I think he's been worked over, and I intend to find out why."

Wanda tossed her head. "You're wrong, Graham. It does not make sense."

"Nothing makes sense lately. But there must be a reason. Maybe everybody gets a laundry-job when they're Socially Secured, just to keep them in line. Maybe my father was double-crossed, sent South just to get him out of the way. All his talk about giving up the Domes, abandoning hypnotherapy conditioning for everyone—it might have been considered dangerous. But he wasn't subversive, he just believed in freedom for the individual." Graham nodded to himself. "I'm going to arrange this call and ask some straight questions, try to get some straight answers. For that matter, I think I'll pass the word along to some of my friends here in the building. Carson, Davis, Loeb. Maybe they can do the same thing when they call. We could pool our information, figure things out."

Wanda's fingers dug into his arm. "Are you sure you know what you're doing?" she asked. "You don't want to start any trouble."

"If my theory is correct, the trouble's already started. And I intend to stop it."

"Graham, think a moment. You shouldn't go ahead without competent advice. Why not see Warner, your Psycho, first?"

"Sure. And have him tell me to relax, forget it? The way my father does, during our vox-box

sessions? The way you're doing now?" He paused. "That's pretty funny, you know—you telling me to relax, when all the while you're digging into my arm clear through to the bone."

"All right," Wanda murmured, but she didn't release her grip. "So I'm concerned about you. I admit it. I don't want you to get mixed up in anything. I don't want you to be hurt." She raised her voice and the tempo of her speech quickened. "Suppose you *are* right, Graham? Suppose your father was laundered, and all the rest of them? Is that so terrible? He's happy, isn't he? Everyone's happy. Everyone who has the sense to conform, to adjust, to stop asking questions that only lead to doubt and torment. Look, Graham, I'm begging you—for your sake, for my sake—let things alone! I won't turn in a report—"

She stopped short and her hand fell away.

Graham stared at her. "Report?" he sighed. "I might have guessed, the way you've been talking lately. Quite a change from that simple little take-another-pill routine. You were planted here with me, weren't you? It's all part of the routine, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm with Intelligence. Zank was worried about you and he wanted to check."

"I suppose you've been recording?"

"No, Graham. I swear it! I haven't, and I won't. You aren't

just a case to me. You haven't been, not since—"

"Well? Since when?"

"Since you asked me to take off my glasses."

She came into his arms and she was all softness and warmth, and in her flesh he sensed surrender.

"Graham, don't you understand what we can have together? It doesn't happen very often any more, and I never believed it would ever happen to me. But it did, and I don't want to lose it. I don't want to lose you."

Graham stared down at the girl-face, the woman-face, the utterly ageless countenance. She might have been twenty, or thirty, or forty—it was hard to tell because of the makeup. And her words might be true, or part-true, or false: he couldn't tell that either. All he could do was listen as she went on.

"Listen, darling. I have important connections. More important than you think. I can arrange it so that you won't have to be troubled any more. We could go away together. Even outside the Domes if you like. There's so much you don't know about, so many wonderful possibilities for the two of us. We can have some of this freedom you seem to want so badly. Just as long as you don't ask questions. Just as long as you take what's given to you freely and without reservation."

"Something for nothing?" Graham murmured gently. "Is

that what you offer me? Or nothing for something?"

"Does it really matter?" She pressed close and her eyes said *no* and her lips said *no* and then her body said *yes, yes, yes*.

Graham released her and stepped back.

"I'd be a bombed fool to turn down an offer like that," he said.

"Then you'll forget about the call?"

He smiled. "Trouble is," he continued, "I *am* a bombed fool." And moved away.

"Where are you going?"

"To arrange for my call. I still think my father's in trouble."

Wanda shook her head. "Maybe he is and maybe he isn't," she told him. "But one thing is definite. *You're* in trouble, now. No, stay where you are."

Her hand sought her shoulder-kit, and emerged from it in a quick gesture. Graham halted as he caught the gleam of a stunner.

"You're turning me in, eh?"

"Yes, but not for punishment. You're still worth saving, darling, and I intend to save you in spite of yourself. And for myself."

Holding the stunner, she motioned him back, then moved toward the wall service-slot. "It's my turn to make an emergency call," she said.

"To Warner?"

"No." The eyes behind the glasses glinted in determination. "I told you I had important connections, didn't I? So I'm taking you right to the top, Graham.

I'm going to turn you over to Sigmund himself, in Hollywood."

CHAPTER 4

WANDA held the stunner on him while she made the call. She held the stunner on him afterwards, while they took the vator down to the level. She held the stunner on him as she flashed her idento to one of the 'coptercab pilots and arranged for immediate launching from Laguna Dome to Hollywood.

The pilot took them to the jet, and again Wanda used her idento to good effect.

Graham began to believe that part about her important connections. It was quite a remarkable thing to arrange for a special jetflight—just the two of them in the huge ship. But Wanda had no trouble doing it. Each step was smoother than the last.

She had no trouble with Graham, either, because the stunner was always ready. Graham respected the stunner. It couldn't kill him, but the excruciating pain preceding paralysis and unconsciousness was something he urgently wished to avoid. And he knew she'd use it.

So he sat there silently during the flight, not even gazing down at the countryside as they launched. Usually he was fascinated by the movement through the hatchway leading out of the Dome, the thrill of propulsion, and the view of the alien land beneath. Now he preferred to sort his thoughts and impres-

sions, unpleasant though the task might be.

And it *was* unpleasant.

Despite his talk of freedom and his contempt for conformity, Graham realized he'd always had a great measure of security and unconsciously relied upon it.

Ever since his father had arranged for his job in Space Opera Division, five years ago, Graham had held an assured place in his world—the little microcosm of the Talent Building in Leguna Dome. He'd been assigned his own apartment, his own Techno staff and crew of assistants. He had his work to rely on.

The departure of his father was a shock, but in a sense Zank took his father's place as mentor and authority. Graham had sensed discontent, inner turmoil, but always he had expressed it against the comfortable counterpoint of security—security in his job, his status, his environment.

Now his job was in jeopardy. Zank obviously had lost his trust in him. The very least that could happen would be a demotion—possibly even a laundry-job, if the Psychos started to probe deeply.

And they would probe deeply, no doubt about it. Graham had heard of Sigmond; who hadn't? He was the Head Shrinker himself, chief of the entire Psycho Division on Coast. Wanda was taking him directly to the top.

Why?

That in turn raised still other

disturbing questions. There was only one obvious answer. Somehow, Graham had stumbled on the truth—his father, the parents of other Talents, perhaps all parents who had been Socially Secured, were being given laundry-jobs. And for a yet unknown reason. Whatever it was, Graham had a pretty definite idea it wouldn't be a pleasant one.

And just what was he going to do about it?

That was the most bothersome question of all. What *could* he do about it? Graham suddenly realized that for all his vaunted intellectual freedom, he was powerless. He'd been trained only to question, not to act upon his questioning. He had experience in exercising his doubts, but there were times when it was more important to exercise his muscles. And he had no training, no experience here.

He couldn't jump Wanda with her stunner. How could he hope to struggle against Sigmond and his staff?

As they descended, off-jet, into the great Hollywood Dome, she offered him a temporary reprieve.

"I'm taking you straight to Psychocenter," she said. "But you won't see Sigmond immediately. He's tied up in a very important top-level."

Graham nodded but remained silent. He was silent all during the 'copter trip across Hollywood, but now he permitted himself to observe their progress.

They passed over the suburb area of Angeles and headed into the capital itself. Here was the emotion-picture plant of TV-Yes, there the production headquarters of NB-See networks. He recognized the cluster of buildings familiarly known as Microcity, from which emanated all the microfilms sent for educational purposes to Big Family Units throughout the country. The ground levels of Angeles had been swarming with workers moving from consumer areas to industry locations between shifts, and above them the 'copters of the Technos and Chiefs whirled restlessly. Here in Hollywood the ground levels were deserted, save for an occasional Jag or Caddy whizzing along a speedway as it bore some dignitary to a top level meeting. And the few 'copters in evidence moved only from one landing-spot to another as Talents went their necessary ways.

For Hollywood was the Home-Dome of the leaders, the planners, the shapers of destiny in these, the Ideal States of America.

Graham found the spire of the Intelligentsium, and near it the huge Technoquarters, dominated by its roof symbol of a giant T-square. Then he felt the 'copter descend and recognized directly beneath him the broad, flat landing-platform of the Psycho-center itself.

He waited until the 'copter settled and the pilot opened the

doors. Wanda motioned toward him with the hand holding the stunner.

"You first," she said. "We're expected."

"So I see." Graham tried to smile as he watched the two white-robed men approaching their 'copter from the far side of the huge roof.

Wanda flashed her idento at them and murmured something. The two men nodded in unison. One of them was short and thin, the other tall and portly. Both wore the pince-nez of their rank and profession.

"Graham," said the short man. "Would you step this way, please?"

There wasn't much choice. Graham glanced around hesitantly as if to confirm the fact. He could jump off the edge of the roof, of course, but—

"Please," Wanda said, putting the stunner back into her shoulder-kit. "Don't be stubborn, darling. They won't harm you, I promise. It's just a routine checkup. Sigmond is interested in you, and I made him promise not to do anything drastic."

"That's correct," said the short, thin man. "You can see we're not armed. This isn't coercion."

Graham nodded, but edged back. The pilot had left the 'copter and was walking across the roof toward an exit-vator. There were several other 'copters in anchor-slots lining the edge of the roof, but the area about them was deserted, except for a

few mechanics a considerable distance away.

Graham watched Wanda and the two men and calculated his chances. If he could just move back to the door of the 'copter, get into it and take off before they could stop him—

"For your information, the pilot locked the panel before he left." The tall, stout man's voice cut his thread of thought suddenly. "So there's no use trying what you have in mind. You see, Graham, we anticipate."

His voice carried conviction.

Wanda stepped forward. "Let me talk to him," she said, over her shoulder, then faced Graham once more. "Be patient, lover, and try to understand. You're not officially in custody—I wouldn't risk calling you 'lover' in front of them if you were, now would I?" She came up to him. "See Sigmond when he's ready, and cooperate. I'll visit you before the night is over." Kissing his forehead, she whispered, "Don't make trouble. I can only protect you within limits."

Graham nodded and squared his shoulders as she stepped back and walked away. He waited until she had disappeared inside the nearest exit-vator.

"All right," he said. "I'm ready."

"Then follow me," said the short man. He began walking across the rooftop. His tall companion fell into step beside Graham.

"That's better," the big man smiled. "By the way, we haven't introduced ourselves, have we?" He nodded in the direction of the short figure ahead. "That's Rankin," he said. "And I'm West."

Somewhat to his surprise, Graham noted that the big man was extending his hand in greeting. The familiar gesture evoked the familiar response. Almost before he knew what he was doing, Graham found himself extending his own hand.

Their palms met, and the man named West began to pump his arm up and down enthusiasti-ally. His grip was strong, and Graham started to draw away as his skin encountered an unexpected abrasive substance that pricked him.

Suddenly a sharp tingling ran up his arm.

He pulled his hand free, shaking it as the pain rose to his elbow, then to his shoulder. At the same time he gazed at West's palm and saw the tiny needle cradled there.

"Tricked me," he said. Or started to say. For his mouth was suddenly numb, just as his arm was numb, and his shoulders and chest. And his legs were melting, his brain was melting.

He noted, with rapidly glazing eyes, that the short man was now standing behind him, ready to catch him when he fell—as he was falling—right now—

And the roof was spinning, the sky beneath the Dome was

spinning, and the voices were spinning all around him.

"That's better," the short man was saying. "Now he's all set for a trip to the Womb."

Graham couldn't be sure he heard it right. The darkness was rushing up much too suddenly, and it filled his ears as well as his eyes. Maybe the short man hadn't said, "Womb." Maybe he'd said, "tomb."

Graham tried to shrug before he fell, as the realization came to him.

Womb or tomb, it wouldn't matter either way, now.

CHAPTER 5

IN THE great Twenty-First-Century-Vox Studios, in the citestate of Hollywood, the top-level proceedings began slowly.

Sigmund squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, wishing he was in a posture-chair. But of course there were no posture-chairs here in the Conference Suite.

It was a whim on the part of Archer, His MGMinence. The tall, thin, hawk-faced man at the head of the table had deliberately chosen to surround himself with the quaint decor of olden times, including all the appurtenances of a medieval "executive suite." In the past, in the days of actual "executive suites," the presidents and chairmen of boards held similar affectations—they indulged themselves in Victorian panelling and Currier and Ives prints in their sanctums.

Sigmund recognized the pattern: the need of authority to bolster its position with symbols of continuity—to hint discreetly that nothing had changed or would ever change, and that the man at the head of the table belonged there by hereditary right and would always remain in that spot.

It pleased Sigmund to realize that Archer felt such basic insecurity, but at the same time he could do with a bit more comfort.

And it annoyed him not a little to see Archer affecting the speech mannerisms and even the dress of another era. Really, the "business suit" he wore belonged at a masquerade—it looked positively grotesque here, when the man was surrounded by the priestly white of his fellow-Psychos, the service blue of the Technobility, and the khaki of the Brass. Even Archer's rimless cycglasses were an anachronism in this collection of costly and ornate frames.

He looked ineffectual and ill at ease now as he rapped for order with an old-fashioned gavel, and his voice was soft and hesitant.

"Let us dispense with formalities," he was saying. "We are gathered here to consider a question of basic policy. That question has been raised, and will be presented now, by our good friend, Dean."

He gazed down the table and Sigmund searched the row of faces across from him until he

located the little sandy-haired man in charge of the Egghead division.

Sigmund was surprised to hear that Dean was raising an issue. He knew him only as a quiet, efficient worker in his special field—which, as the name implied, was that of education. Somebody on Sigmund's staff must have a complete *dossiere* on Dean's background as a matter of course, but there had never been any reason for Sigmund himself to check on him.

Now the little man was on his feet, clearing his throat and running one hand nervously through his hair.

"Your MGMinence, fellow workers. I have recently been in consultation with various officials in both the Techno and the Intelligence divisions. I questioned them deliberately in order to verify certain conclusions of my own—conclusions based on research in the educational field. As you know, it is my duty to work with facts. And the facts available to me recently lead to inevitable validation. I've gathered all the data and testimony and placed it in the hands of His MGMinence before asking permission to speak here this afternoon. And here is what the facts tell us."

Dean paused.

Just what are you driving at? Sigmund wondered.

He found out in a moment. "The facts tell us that we've done a good job in the past. In

less than three generations, Planned Society has done away with disease, poverty, war, personal insecurity. We have eliminated competitive economy, political and religious strife. We have exploded once and for all the pernicious old fallacy that 'you can't change human nature.' We *have* changed it, and for the better.

"As an Egghead I teach the young, the future workers of the Ideal States of America, to appreciate their good fortune. I teach them that all our wants and needs are cared for by a regular system of interchange between three thousand Domes, without the use of currency, or the oldstyle profit-motive which led only to friction and unrest. Our population of thirty millions is assured of food, clothing, shelter, medical and psychiatric assistance as part of the Standard Allotment. Recreation and luxuries can be earned by making a good personal adjustment to working and living conditions. Every worker over the age of fifty is Socially Secured, and the average life-expectancy has risen to one hundred years. So far, so good. I've no quarrel with it. But in view of the facts now at our disposal, we must move further. Have we gone as far as we can go? Is what we have done good enough? I say the answer is 'no'!"

They were listening to Dean now, all of them. His voice was flat and uninspired, but it had been a long time since the word

"no" had been uttered in the presence of His MGMinence.

"The time has come when it is safe to abandon the Domes. Vast areas outside have been tested and found to be thoroughly decontaminated. There is no longer a need to depend on special farm areas or hydroponic installations. The entire continent is again ready for human habitation."

Dean's final sentences were almost drowned out in the excited buzzing which arose from both sides of the table. He hesitated, then went on.

"This is not my opinion. I repeat, it's authenticated information, coming directly from Schwartz himself."

Eyes turned now to regard the plump, swarthy Techno Chief at the other end of the table.

"Well, Schwartz?" Dean challenged. "Is what I say here the truth?"

Schwartz nodded indifferently. "Our Geiger Count for the past three years is well below minimum, on the basis of eighteen thousand separate checks. Field surveys and readings bear this out. His MGMinence is in possession of this data."

The buzzing rose again, and Dean's voice quelled it.

"That's not all," he proclaimed. "There are other factors. Our production-rate, for example. Even now, inside the Domes, we have ample living-space and provision for a population of fifty millions instead of thirty. Once

we leave the Domes there's no reason why we can't double or triple this figure—don't forget that a hundred years ago this country supported almost a hundred and eighty million people. True, Ormsbee?"

Sigmund saw his Medic colleague nod emphatically.

"Therefore," Dean continued hastily, "I advocate the immediate revision of our policy toward the Socially Secured. Even without leaving the Domes we can raise the age-level from fifty to sixty. We can remove checks upon population entirely. We can, when we abandon the Domes, eliminate a great portion of our conditioning techniques, including hypnotherapy. Let us move forward once more, confidently and aggressively, into a new era of freedom—"

This time the little man was not interrupted by a buzz, but by a roar. Half a dozen white-clad figures fluttered to their feet, but it was the khaki-clad Hix, Chief of Brass, whose shattering bellow claimed attention.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded. "Next thing you'll have us repealing the Declaration of Dependence!"

The blasphemy shocked them into silence. And Dean took advantage of it to reply.

"Yes," he said, softly. "This will come too, in time." He peered earnestly at the faces around him. "We have founded a Planned Society, and all has gone well. So well that we've become overly complacent. We've

unconsciously come to accept the *status quo* as a fixed and eternal norm. But the world changes. Physical conditions change. And we must change with them in order to survive. Unless we are willing to move forward we shall inevitably go backward.

"It is not easy for us to consider giving up certain rights and privileges we now enjoy as directors of this social order. But I say to you that we must. A glance at history is sufficient to remind us of this fact. Unless we take steps, we shall find ourselves going the way of all leaders who refused to recognize the need of change in the past. The kings, emperors, knights, nobles, industrial despots, rugged individualists. All of them vanished, whether they ruled by the divine right of kings or the power of the almighty dollar. Let's not make the same mistake of opposing progress. I say, open the Domes at once."

Dean sat down suddenly, so suddenly that his audience was unprepared for it. There was no buzzing; merely a silence in which each man sought to read the reaction of his fellows.

Sigmund alone was impassive. So he dropped his C-bomb, he thought. Whoever would have expected it, and from him, of all people? Better check on his background immediately.

Then he dismissed the thought. Right now he wanted to consider what would happen

next. Surely Archer must be prepared to answer this heresy.

And yes, now his MGMinence was rising to his feet. It would be interesting to see how his counter-strategy evolved.

"Gentlemen," he began. "I'm sure we have all given serious consideration to what our good friend Dean has said here. I can assure you that he has indeed given me a complete file of reports from various departments which back up his findings."

Archer paused, and Sigmund waited for him to continue with anticipatory relish. He recognized the gambit now—disarm your opponent by conceding something, then move in for the kill.

"However," Archer droned, "I feel that some of you are not entirely convinced. Perhaps you recall an ancient proverb that figures don't lie, but liars can figure.

"If such is the case, then allow me to go on record personally in assuring you that Dean speaks the truth. The Domes *can* be opened up tomorrow, and dispensed with entirely. We *can* increase the population indefinitely without harm to our economy. We *can* not only raise the age-level of the Socially Secured, but abandon the entire program. We *can*, in short order, do away with the Declaration of Dependence and return to a form of government and economy similar to that which existed in the past. Dean's statements and his conclusions are, in my opinion, entirely correct."

What's this? Sigmond asked himself. *Unconditional surrender? Senile dementia, more likely.*

"Before we put the matter to a vote," Archer was saying, "there's just one more thing we might consider. Planned Society is more than a political or economic concept. It is based upon the principle of psychiatric supervision. For that reason, I suggest we get an opinion from the one man best qualified to give us a sane, objective reaction—our Psycho Chief himself. Sigmond, what have you to say?"

Plenty, Sigmond thought as he arose. I underestimated you, Archer. You know what you're doing. You let Dean stick his neck out and now you're letting me stick mine out. You won't betray yourself by taking sides—but you'll be there, ready to back the winner. No wonder you've always been Your MGMInence. And if I want to remain Psycho Chief, I'd better see that I win.

The tall Psycho Chief stood there staring down at Dean for a long moment, and when he began to speak his voice was gentle.

"His MGMInence is right, you know," he said, softly. "You have given us facts and a partial conclusion. But no conclusion is correct unless it takes into account a clinical diagnosis of the situation.

"You've studied your history, Dean. When you remind us of

the old days, a hundred years ago, you're speaking of a time when psychiatry was only a small and somewhat suspect branch of what was then called organized medicine. Its practitioners numbered less than seven thousand throughout the country, and its authority was limited to a purely advisory capacity. Those were evil days, Dean, in the time of the Big Neurosis, before the wars.

"Then came the Big Trauma, and the picture changed. The Big Trauma, when the bombs fell. And psychiatry rose in general esteem. It was useful to the Brass of that day in dealing with the armed forces. It was useful in Intelligence work. Psychiatrists were called upon to counsel the leaders of industry and business and government, but still without official status or great power. On the individual level, psychiatry dealt only with those confined in institutions or those few who could afford to command private treatment. But respect for its opinions and techniques grew.

"The Big Trauma continued. The enemy population of the world virtually vanished. Radiation and disease ravaged the earth, and we here at home were not immune to fallout, famine and frenzy.

"Government, as we knew it then, vanished in the panic and peril of the times. There was no voice of authority remaining. Brass of that day had won a victory—but at a hideous price in

lives and security. Brass was discredited. Economic leaders were suspect because they had 'led us into war' and 'profited' by it. The so-called 'politicians' and 'religious leaders' had shown themselves unable to prevent panic and privation. The country was disorganized; no civil or military authority was able to restore order.

"And yet salvation was at hand. For by this time the so-called authorities had learned to rely upon psychiatrists for guidance in every crisis. The generals, business moguls, scientists, industrialists and intellectuals who looked to psychiatry for a solution of both personal and public problems now instinctively turned to them for leadership. And since psychiatrists now held key positions in military and civil life, there was less difficulty than might be expected. They knew how to influence public opinion, how to bring about the desired reactions on the part of the masses."

Sigmund paused. He allowed his voice to deepen and gather strength. "But we all know what happened," he said. "Meanwell and Stoltz were appointed, with broad temporary powers, by what was then the Congress of the United States. They convened the first Clinic and formulated the Declaration of Independence. The Brass was behind them when, in a surprise move, they dissolved the very Congress that had given them free rein.

They had control of the primitive TV-radio facilities as they directed the Brass in restoring order. They cooperated with the engineers and the scientists—whom we now refer to as Technos—in erecting the first Domes and installing oxygenator equipment.

"At first the workers were uncooperative, as might be expected. But once the Domes went up, once they realized they could be admitted and gain protection against fallout and disease, their attitudes changed.

"There was opposition from the forces of politics and religion, but they had no weapons and no alternative plans—nor could they combat radioactivity with empty phrases. We had the Domes. And we had the plan. The plan of Planned Society.

"Slowly we evolved the present pattern, creating the top-level leadership divisions of Psychos, Technos, Brass and Intelligence. It wasn't 'government' in the old-fashioned meaning of the term—it was a delicate neuro-surgical operation on the body politic.

"And there's no need to tell you that the operation was a success. In three generations we have witnessed the triumph of *psyche* over *soma*, thanks to the introduction of new methods of therapy. As you know, we have analyzed the causes of social disorder—pinpointed the aggressive instincts which lead to atomobiological war on a broad scale or frustration and discontent

on the part of the individual. Through the ages, men sought to thwart, stifle or deny the very presence of these instinctual drives. The leaders have always lied in the past. They told men that they were all created equal—that they were brothers who must turn the other cheek. They preached peace without attempting to harness the basic forces, internal and external, which lead only to continuing conflict.

"Our therapy took other forms, Dean. Instead of denying the basic drives, we have chosen to satiate them through surrogates. There has been a redefinition of the nature of reality. Sound Psycho principles govern every aspect of life here in the Domes. And the Domes themselves are admirable microcosms, in which we can experiment in our search for social stability and adjustment.

"Our experiment has been successful. That you have already admitted. And why? Because the very physical nature of the Domes lends itself to *control*. That's the secret of our way of life, Dean—*control*. Control leading to adjustment. Adjustment leading to security.

"Suppose we have reached a time when we can give up the Domes without physical danger. What do we stand to gain? We're not overcrowded now. The standard of living surpasses anything known in history. There's no need for more room.

"Population-wise, what pos-

sible end can be served by the spawning of additional millions? Again, what do we stand to gain by such a move?"

Sigmund stared at Archer, trying to read that timid, tired face—a face which he now recognized was only a façade.

"That's a question I cannot answer, a question *you* have not answered. What do we stand to gain by this?" He wheeled now and levelled a finger at Dean. "There is however, one question I can and must answer. A question we all must consider. *What do we have to lose?*

"The moment we open up the Domes, we lose the whole basic pattern of our success. We lose *control*.

"Disperse the population over a wide area, and see how quickly a wide difference in living patterns due to varied climate and geography will lead to a resumption of all the old rivalries—North against South, farm against city, and all the rest.

"Eliminate the program for the Socially Secured and you'll set up again the patterns of hatred which split old-fashioned society into two secretly warring camps—the struggle between Youth and Old Age.

"Do away with hypnotherapy conditioning and the Big Family Unit will disappear. Before you know it, we'll be back to the old style family situation; the very source of inner conflict and tension.

"We couldn't hope to combat these things, gentlemen. All our

facilities for education and opinion-moulding — TV, emotion - pictures, information-screening—couldn't hope to function efficiently amidst a dispersed population. Even in the days of the Big Neurosis, when mass psychology was just a primitive tool in the hands of amateurs called 'advertising men', there was a name for a group such as ours. It was called a 'captive audience.' We can't afford to lose them.

"Lose them, and we lose our lives. Turn them loose and they'll turn against us, in the name of freedom. Freedom! Freedom from our surrogates means only freedom to kill, to destroy."

Sigmund paused and sighed. "Perhaps you think I speak as I do out of selfishness, out of fear for my own safety and yours. That is not the case. I would gladly make any sacrifice—even the sacrifice of my life—if I thought it would truly serve the greater good. But I am a Psycho. I have devoted my existence to the study of humanity. And I know that Mankind is not yet ready to move ahead without psychiatric control. He will use his freedom not only against us but against himself.

"What Dean here is really proposing is to turn back the tide of history. He is asking us to revert to the days of the Big Psychosis, the time of anarchy.

"Gentlemen, it is up to you to make a choice. But remember—if you choose to abandon the

Domes, abandon the sound system of control we have so carefully set up, you are choosing the inevitable consequences of that decision. You are choosing a return to the old competitive economy, a return to religion and politics and yes, even monogamy! You are choosing war. You are choosing so-called individual freedom at the expense of mass aberration."

Sigmund sat down. His own words had moved him more strongly than he realized—for he had spoken out of the uttermost depths of his inmost conviction. Now he found himself oddly empty and depleted.

In an effort to shake himself out of the mood, he forced his attention away from the present scene. He refused to permit himself to listen to Dean's hesitant rebuttal, or to observe the reaction of his audience here in the room. Instead he directed his attention to a totally different problem.

As Archer rose and called for a vote on the question, Sigmund concentrated on the problem of the young Talent whom Wanda had brought in for processing just before the meeting began. It was just a routine checkup, probably, but Wanda was a pretty shrewd operator and there might be something worth investigating here. If she thought it was important, he'd better not take any chances. Well, the boys were working on it right now, and it wouldn't

take long to get a scenario into filming. He could assemble the film and study it right after this meeting ended. Wanda seemed insistent that he handle this Talent's problem personally.

And now, what was this interruption? Sigmond jerked back to awareness. Ah, yes, the vote. The question. Archer was calling for a show of hands.

"All those in favor of—"

Sigmond felt excitement ripple up his spine as he peered around the room. How many hands would be going up?

Dean's, of course. And that Medic, Ormsbee, the one who supported him on population-increases. Sigmond made a mental note to look into Ormsbee's background, too.

At the same time he permitted himself to relax. Only two hands in favor.

"All those opposed—"

Sigmond raised his own hand, exulting in spite of himself as he saw his gesture duplicated all around the table.

Of course. The motion was defeated. There was nothing to fear. He could handle Dean and Ormsbee, unless His MGM-ness Archer chose to take care of it himself.

He smiled down the table at Archer, as the meeting adjourned. Perhaps it might be wise to say a word to him in private.

No, that could wait. Archer was going to play his game of the impartial observer—why spoil it with a public discussion?

Several of the group, including Techno Chief Schwartz and Brass Chief Hix, came up now to congratulate Sigmond on his speech. He nodded, made the customary acknowledgments, and moved away as quickly as possible.

He left the chamber and returned to ground level prepared to take up his daily duties once more. This Talent matter, now—

Young West was waiting for him in his office.

"What's the report?" he asked. "Do a scenario?"

"All filmed." West tried to keep from smirking, but he was obviously quite pleased with himself. "Rankin's keeping watch over him upstairs—he's still out."

"What's his name, by the way?"

"Graham." West waited, obviously expecting a reaction, and when none came, he added, "Lewis's son."

"Lewis? You don't mean—?"

"Exactly." West was smirking openly, now. "Quite a surprise, isn't it? I think you'll find the film extremely interesting."

Sigmond privately agreed, but he tried to conceal his impatience. "Very well, I'll look at it if you like." Then, keeping his voice casual, he asked, "What's your prognosis?"

West licked his lips. "Of course it's really not my place to say anything of a prejudicial nature," he murmured. "But if you ask me, on the basis of

what I've seen, Graham is just about ready for a little trip back to the Womb."

CHAPTER 6

FIRST there was the needle and then there was the voice asking questions. First there was his own voice saying "no" and then came the other needle and his own voice saying "yes."

After that Graham went back down into the darkness, listening to both voices—the strange voice, asking the questions and his own voice (equally strange now) giving the answers.

Then there was this thing on his head, and he was talking into it and the questions came from inside his head, and then another needle pricked and he knew he could stop talking and just *think* his answers. Not think, really, but visualize. That's what the voice wanted, that's what the needle wanted, that's what the thing on his head wanted. He was supposed to *see* the answers, make images out of them. And he couldn't lie. He couldn't make up answers out of his imagination. He had to use real images. The voice and the needle and the thing on his head wouldn't let him lie.

Graham didn't want to lie, anyway. This wasn't coercion. The thing on his head told him so, or maybe it was the needle, or the voice—it was all very confusing, and it didn't matter

since the three were parts of the same thing. Anyway, he knew he wasn't being forced into anything. It was just that he had to tell the truth so that he could sleep. They were playing fair with him.

Yes they were, because when he had *seen* all there was to see, all they wanted to see, they let him sleep. He slept for a long time (minutes, hours, days, weeks, centuries, forever) and when he woke up he felt fine. He could sit up, or even walk if he wanted to. At the moment he was content to sit, because Sigmond was in the room with him.

Sigmond, the Head Shriner himself. He seemed like a pleasant enough person—a big man, with a pale face and a high forehead. He might have been forty, might have been fifty, or even older. It was hard to say. Of course he wouldn't be Socially Secured at fifty.

The thought jolted Graham out of his present acceptance. Socially Secured. His father. That's why they'd done this to him, given him a laundry-job—

Sigmond was staring at him, and now he reached forward and put his hand on Graham's shoulder.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You gave me a laundry-job," Graham said.

Sigmond chuckled. "Nonsense, my boy. We don't indulge in such measures here. And I assure you, if we did, you wouldn't be sitting up and ready to

take nourishment now, nor for a week. Your stomach couldn't retain food, any more than your mind could retain a thought. There's an old saying which applies to laundry-jobs, you know—"it all comes out in the wash".

He chuckled again, but Graham interrupted him.

"Then what *did* you do to me?" he asked.

"Simple script-therapy. We asked for a scenario, and got it. The Ganz method."

"Visualization of mental images transcribed directly on film?"

"You've heard of it, eh?"

"There was talk of adopting it for Talents, in emotion-picture work. I guess it was too personalized, though."

"So I should imagine." Sigmond smiled. "Your own film is *very* personalized, I might say. Seldom have I seen such introspection."

"You've seen it?"

"Of course. Would you care to?"

"Why are *you* seeing me? What do you want of me?"

"Nothing but your honest reaction. That's the principle of filmanalysis, my dear Graham. Project the unconscious so that the conscious can see it. Then let the superego review and criticize. It's really the only efficient form of therapy. I'm hoping some day we can make it available generally, for routine use in checkups. As of now it's a little bit too expensive and

complicated for anything except special cases."

"I'm a special case, then?"

"Let's see the film and permit you to decide for yourself." Sigmond rose and beckoned to Graham. "We'll use my office," he said. "I've got everything set up."

Graham was not reluctant to leave the windowless cubicle behind—its bed reminded him vaguely of a hospital area. He followed Sigmond down the corridor, noting that the Psycho Chief was carrying a stunner. Sigmond didn't flourish it, nor did he allude to its presence in words. That was completely unnecessary. No need for guards, either! not here in Psychocenter. Graham knew that the very idea of rebellion or escape was ridiculous.

A vator took them down. For some reason Graham had assumed Sigmond's office would be near the top of the huge building. He was surprised to find it on ground-level. He was equally surprised at the modest three-room suite. Guards and office personnel greeted the Psycho Chief deferentially enough, but there was nothing about the furnishings and appointments of the office to indicate Sigmond's important rank.

There were three rooms, and Sigmond led him to the center chamber. Here was the desk, the couch, and the viewer—no other equipment. Graham wondered if the Psycho Chief used film-

analysis exclusively. And if so, why.

The room darkened as Sigmond seated himself at the desk, the film came on, and then Graham found the answer.

Sigmond had told the truth. Filmanalysis was the only efficient method of therapy.

The film itself was crude, just a simple two-dimensional black-and-white job such as Graham himself had never seen except in the ancient clips kept in the Space Opera files for obscure reference purposes. It didn't even have a sound-track, let alone sensories. And the little projector unreeled it jerkily. But none of this mattered. Graham had never seen anything before which could equal its claim upon his interest.

Because it was *his* film. It was *his* mind, *his* life up there on the screen before him. Here were *his* thoughts, naked and unveiled, for all to see.

How far back had they taken him? Early childhood! Infancy? Pre-natal? The seething kaleidoscope held few clues. There was a visual blur, the kind of blur seen by the unfocussing eyes of a tiny infant. There was a parade of giant images—of huge hands, grotesquely enlarged faces. There were sudden movements holding inexplicable threats, leading to uncomprehended consequences. And there was Father. Father, holding him. He recognized the face, and at the same time it wasn't really Father's face at all; just an

idealized countenance that smiled and laughed and beamed.

Graham blinked. It wasn't *himself* in the picture either. He was small, yes, but strangely enough his features were those of an adult. An adult's face on a baby's body.

"Confused?" Sigmond murmured, from the darkness behind him. "Remember, this is a visualization of the subconscious. No age-differentiation. Very little contact with actual reality. All subjective, has to be interpreted. Notice that the backgrounds are sketchy and the action jumps. That's because of the way you were questioned, of course—we weren't after unimportant details. And also because the subconscious imagery is a sort of mental shorthand. The dream-symbols are there, too."

Graham was oriented, now. He understood why, as his life-pattern unfolded in childhood, the actors often moved against the sketchiest type of scene. A whole room would be symbolized by just a door and a chair—sometimes the door was big, in an instance where the action centered around the need to escape, or leave; sometimes the chair was most important as a refuge or a place of comfort.

He saw himself as a small boy. He recognized incidents, and there were many things he didn't recognize. Interspersing actual events were glimpses of another world; a dream-world, a

realm of nightmare. He was engulfed in vast floods of enuresis, he was pursued by the fecal finger of fate, he lost himself in remote fantasies of fear, anger, and—surprisingly enough—infantile lust.

Graham felt his cheeks burn as he watched. His palms grew wet and he stirred in his posture-chair. Was *this* the way it had been? Were these the secret places of his psyche?

It had to be. There was no other answer, no possible way in which this film could be faked. It was the truth, ripped raw from his inmost self and projected for his outward self to realize.

Adolescence began, and with it a heightening of the sexual element. At the same time the imagery grew subtly more sophisticated in content. Father was reduced to "life-size" proportions, and the various characters in the scenes began to move in response to predictable and recognizable motivations. And yet the growing "realism" in itself formed a background of shocking contrast to the occasional outbursts of fantasy and fugue—the imagined orgies of cruelty and lust, of self-pity, self-abasement, and egomaniac delusions of grandeur. Here was rape, and murder, and suicide, and idiotic euphoria: here was sentiment and sentimentality, oceans of blood and tears and glandular secretion.

Graham shuddered as he

watched, yet clung to the intervals of reality—his conversations with his father. He watched himself talk to the older man, and watched the subject-matter of their discussions unfold in a sort of superimposition on the screen. It was a sort of double-image taking the place of a spoken or written account of their conversations, and in it he recognized the elements Sigmund must have been seeking.

Indeed, the Psycho Chief admitted as much.

"I want you to watch very closely from this point on," he said. "I think you'll begin to see the emergence of a pattern both of thought and of behavior. It's up to you to determine its significance."

Graham nodded. He felt his cheeks burn once more. This was going to continue, he realized. It would continue, inevitably and inexorably, right up to the present moment. He'd see himself becoming a nonconformist, see himself preaching rebellion, see himself as a cheater, a secret scanner of forbidden microfilms, a secret holdout against authority. He'd see all the fears and frustrations of his later years. Worst of all, he'd see once again the hideous trauma of his father's leaving—see his departure for the ranks of the Socially Secured. He'd see his own loneliness, and virtually reexperience the acute mental crisis which had grown intolerably in recent months—grown to the point where he'd foolishly flouted

Zank and made that Realie film. Graham thought of a thousand things he wanted to conceal—not only from Sigmond but from himself as well. He thought of having to watch himself with Wanda the other night. How could he bear it? And how could he bear the knowledge that Sigmond knew, too?

He started to blink, and Sigmond must have guessed it, because he whispered, "Don't close your eyes. You've got to face it. Face yourself as you really are."

I can't, Graham thought. Help me, please help me, stop this, Father—

The buzzer sounded, jerking him back to reality. A vox-box blared.

"Front to Sigmond. Krug here for briefing and orders."

Sigmond clicked a switch. His own voice was low. "Yes. With him immediately."

Behind his back, Graham was conscious that the big man had risen and moved across the room.

"Stay where you are and keep watching," Sigmond said. "I'll only be a few moments."

He crossed to the door and opened it. A flash of light and then the door closed behind him once more. Graham was alone. Alone with the film. It ground on and on—but he wasn't watching. He didn't have to watch, now.

He stood up, deliberately turning his back, and faced the projector on Sigmond's desk. In its

beam he surveyed the room. No windows. Just the door through which Sigmond had made his exit, and another door leading to the rear office.

It was a waste of time even to think about looking for an avenue of escape. There was no escape, not here. Not any more, after the filmanalysis had been made. Graham acknowledged the fact wryly. He didn't have to see the rest. He knew what it would be—a self-damning portrait of a maladjusted individual. The inevitable sequel would be a laundry-job or perhaps even a trip to the Womb.

Graham nodded absently. His gaze focussed on the desk-top. Something shone in the projector's light. A long, silver cylinder—Sigmond's stunner! He'd left it there when he went out of the room!

Graham moved toward it. His hand grasped quickly. Here, at least, was a weapon.

Holding the stunner in his palm, he walked over to the door, then halted at the sound of Sigmond's voice, faint yet intelligible.

He placed his ear against the panel, and his eye focussed on the tiny sliver of light between door and frame. He could see into the front office.

Sigmond stood there, talking to a short, squat man in a Brass uniform.

"—papers are all in order," Sigmond was saying. "You're in charge of tonight's Jetfleet. Destination, Miami Consumarket.

Six in the lot, total cargo of eighteen hundred. Officers as listed. By the way, you've a new assistant. Name is Mellot. He's to meet you here."

"What happened to Smith?" Krug scowled, and it made his face look older.

"Transferred to Sadies. But Mellot's a capable man. You'll have to break him in, of course, and he doesn't know anything about procedure. He's due to report here now and—"

Graham turned away. He had suddenly remembered the other door here in the office. It led, presumably, through the third room of Sigmond's suite to a corridor beyond.

There would be guards there, of course, and guards all the way to the outer level. But now he had a stunner.

Graham weighed his chances. They were slim, slim as the outline of the stunner in his hand. He glanced once more at the screen. The film was still unreeling; he caught sight of himself in an erotic fantasy and shuddered. Sigmond knew all about him, and as a Psycho he would take the inevitable steps. Anything was better than to await his return and passively submit. If he moved quickly, now—

He moved quickly, but not quickly enough. As he reached the other door it swung open and a khaki-clad man entered the room.

He stood there, surprised, blinking in the dimness. "I must

have made a mistake," he murmured. "They told me this would be Sigmond's office."

"It is," Graham quickly assured him.

"Good. Mellot reporting." The tall young man noticed the screen for the first time. "What's this, something special going on?"

"Very special. Would you care to stay and watch?" Without waiting for an answer, Graham raised the stunner and pressed the switch. He aimed at the center of the forehead, above the pineal area.

Mellot froze.

He stood there like an old-fashioned window dummy, and like an old-fashioned window dummy he was divested of his garments.

Graham stripped hastily and donned the khaki uniform. He felt in one pocket for the idento. Mellot was approximately his size and build, and his hair was dark—curly instead of straight, but maybe that wouldn't matter. Graham could only hope. Hope and act.

Mellot was on the floor now, rigid in paralysis. Graham had to take the risk of lowering him, even if bones were broken, in order to remove his trousers and shoes. Mellot's eyes stared up at him glassily—the stunner had done its work well, and even the optic nerve was temporarily paralyzed.

Graham tried to remember the duration of the stunner's effect. Two hours, or was it three? Long

enough to get out of here, if he was going to get out at all.

He rose, adjusting his uniform. Now, if he could get past Sigmond in some way and contact Krug—

Once more he approached the other door, just in time to hear Sigmond's voice.

—try to locate him immediately. I'll step in and check with Front to see if he reported in yet."

Graham bit his lip and stepped back against the wall as the door opened and Sigmond stepped back into the room. The door closed again, quickly, as the Psycho strove to readjust his vision in the darkness.

"Graham," he called. "Where are you, Graham?"

"Right here."

Sigmond turned, noting the body on the floor for the first time.

"What—"

The stunner flicked on. Sigmond's mouth froze along with the rest of his body. Graham wondered, momentarily, how the autonomous nervous system managed to function in maintaining circulation and respiration in spite of the stunner's effect. Then he dismissed the question: it was certainly not important now.

What was important was to push Sigmond's immobilized body back against the wall, to square his own shoulders, take a deep breath, and open the door.

Graham stepped into the other

office and extended his idento with a smile.

"Krug?" he murmured. "Mellot reporting for duty."

The Brass nodded, not bothering to glance at the idento. "How'd you get into Sigmond's office?"

"They gave me directions outside. I came in through the other entrance. He said you were waiting for me here."

"Right." Krug put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Well, let's be on our way. We're due to leave for Miami in an hour."

CHAPTER 7

BY THE time they arrived at Jetport, the Farewell was in full swing.

The Jets stood alone under the lights of the launching-platforms on the big field, separated from the runways by barricades. The Technos were readying them for takeoff, while Krug checked with them by means of his audio-relay. He stood on the edge of the Administration roof, looking down at the activities of preparation.

But Graham, at his side, had eyes only for the mob behind the barricades. He was watching the Farewell.

The friends of the Socially Secured milled about, singing and shouting their good-byes, shaking hands and extending farewell gifts to the group which stood apart in single file before the gates.

Graham recognized their enthusiasm; realized, too, that it was only a pale shadow of the emotion which suffused the faces of the Socially Secured themselves.

They waited impatiently, garbed in the special dress donned for Departure—the golden robe worn only by those who had been found to be fit and fifty. Most of them had handtrucks to convey their belongings—Graham was surprised at the amount of luggage some of these elderly people were taking with them. His own father had departed virtually empty-handed, except for a few personal microfilm files. But then, his father was a Talent, not a worker. The workers were different. They were great accumulators. People with fantasies of projection, pride of ownership. The Psychos were doing their best to gradually stamp out the viewpoint—they'd outlawed Jags and Caddies for everyone except Technos many years ago, for example. But still the workers clung to material possessions. Some of the Socially Secured would be taking new things into the South, too; there would be fishing-tackle and other unusual items. Graham had heard that in some Resorts they even permitted hunting.

Krug barked something into the audio-relay and the gates opened beneath them. Shouting and waving, the line of Socially Secured moved across the field, escorted by Brass guides. The

handtrucks rolled with smooth, electrified precision.

Krug glanced at his assistant and nodded. "Quite a sight, isn't it?" he commented.

Graham nodded. "This is all new to me," he answered. "I've got a lot to learn."

"Well, you might as well enjoy yourself tonight. Next time we make a run, I'm putting you in with the crew, to pick up general procedure. But this trip is just for orientation."

Graham nodded. The talk of "next time" disturbed him. He'd have to make plans quickly. Granted that he'd be able to get away with this before somebody at Psychocenter discovered what had happened and relayed the information here.

He glanced nervously over his shoulder, half-expecting the arrival of a messenger—and guards. But the roof was empty. Maybe he'd be leaving in time. He wished they'd take off now.

"Any questions?" Krug was asking.

Graham blinked. He remembered that he was Mellot now; he had a role to play. The new assistant. What would the new assistant ask at a time like this?

"One thing does surprise me," Graham said, slowly. "They all seem to be so happy. Don't any of them ever have any regrets at leaving here?"

Krug shook his head. "Why should they? What's so wonderful about being an agriculturist or a laborian or an industrician that anyone would be sorry to

quit? Oh, they're all adjusted, but think of the benefits they're going to get. Maybe fifty years of taking it easy at government expense, thanks to geriatrics. Isn't that better than the old way they tell us about—when a man had to slave at a job until he was ready to drop, and then be dependent on a small pension or whatever he could manage to lay away?"

"I wasn't thinking of that," Graham persisted. "I was thinking about giving up friends, family ties—"

Krug looked at him sharply, and he realized he'd made a mistake.

"What do you mean, family ties?"

"Well, extended mating-arrangements, for example—"

Krug's glance didn't soften. "Where'd you take training?" he asked.

"Sanmonica, of course." Graham remembered there was a Brass schooling-center there, and hoped it was the right answer.

"Didn't they tell you that all mating-arrangements for workers terminate in the forty-sixth year?"

"Oh, that's right. I'd forgotten."

"Well don't forget. That's important. At forty-six the special conditioning begins. Class-therapy, one night a week. Indoctrination courses for Social Security. They're taught what to expect when they go South. Usually, their jobs are switched around,

too, and they're moved to a new living-area, just so old ties can be broken. After a few years, they adapt. And of course they know that once they arrive in the South, they can free-mate all they please. That's one of the reasons they look happy about leaving, now."

Graham nodded. "Don't they ever allow them to stay with mates? I mean, if both reach the age of fifty at the same time?"

Krug spat over the edge of the roof. "Why should they? Might as well expect them to take their own offspring along. The whole point of conditioning is to eliminate all the dangers of the oldstyle family setup, with 'romantic love' and 'marriage' and such aberrations. I'm no Psycho, boy, but you know as well as I do what that meant. Why, almost all our troubles in the old days came from the dangers of just that sort of thing. The very roots of psychic disorder stemmed from those family situations—with permanent parents, the Oedipus-complex, sibling rivalry."

Graham half-listened as he watched the Socially Secured file up the ramps into the waiting Jets. He glanced behind once more. All clear.

Krug noticed his movements. "Anxious to get started? So am I. Let's go down. We're on First Jet, of course." He guided Graham to the vator. On the way down he checked details through his audio-relay. Apparently sat-

isfied, he switched it off as they reached the field and walked through the gates to the waiting Jet in the foreground.

"That's part of it, of course," he continued, taking up the thread of the conversation without interruption. "The rest, as you should know, was a matter of the old-time rivalry between youth and age. The family situation only helped to keep it alive: father against son, mother against daughter, younger children against the eldest. And you know what it did to the community. Before Planned Society you saw it everywhere. The young who went out to fight and die resented the old who stayed behind to pick up the profits in safety. It wasn't until the Psychos came along and hit on the solution of separating the two groups that we got stability. Today all those tensions are gone. We don't worry about parents or our elders or bigger boys or any of that nonsense. When we're young, we stay with our own age-group, in a Big Family Unit. We work with our own age-group, leave with our own age-group when we're Socially Secured. There's nothing left behind to cause us any regrets."

Krug cleared his throat. "Of course, I'm just speaking figuratively, you might say. You and I, we don't have to bother. We're exempt from being Socially Secured at fifty or any other age. We can keep on going until we're eighty or ninety, even."

He paused at the foot of the Jet-ramp and placed his hand on Graham's shoulder. "I want you to remember that tonight, because it's important. No matter what you think, just keep on remembering—you'll never be Socially Secured." He shook his head emphatically. "Look at me. I'm sixty-four. Hard to believe, isn't it? But it's true. And I'm good for another twenty years. Just keep in line and the same holds true for you."

A buzzer sounded on his audio-relay and he switched it on. Graham gulped, but the voice was merely reporting the successful boarding of the Jets and clearing with Krug for take-off.

"This way." The Brass led him forward to the cabin. The pilot was already working at the instrument-panel, while the co issued instructions to their passengers in the space behind. Each of the six Jets carried a full complement of three hundred. Huge as they were, Graham couldn't help but feel sorry for the Socially Secured—they must be crowded back in there. Even a two-hour flight would be an ordeal.

Krug, apparently, had no such compunctions. He conferred with pilot and co, then sent a final message to Control through his audio-relay.

Graham sat next to him in the cabin, just behind the pilots' seats before the panel.

"Strap," Krug told him. He indicated a lever at Graham's side. "Seat-chute. Just press in

case of emergency. But you know that, of course. It's only that sometimes they forget, on the first trip. Liable to be quite a shock."

Graham smiled. The back of his neck was wet. They'd be taking off in a moment. Taking off. Getting out of here. Heading South, to the Resorts. How far was Miami from Gulfport? Maybe he could shake Krug down there, get to his father. He'd have to plan carefully, but no sense thinking about that now. It all depended on the situation when he arrived. At the moment the important thing was to get away.

And they were leaving.

Leaving with a shudder and with shock, with pulsation and pressure and power—but leaving nonetheless, so that Graham's heart soared with the ship. The launchers propelled them through the opening in the plexide Dome with split-second precision, and then they were clear, and jetting. Lights dimmed, brightened. The ship was on course, at a steady seven hundred.

Krug fumbled at a compartment next to his seat. "Hungry?" he asked.

Graham shook his head.

Krug shrugged and unwrapped a hamsan. He munched thoughtfully. "Better check in," he muttered, reaching for a comm-tube.

Graham held his breath as Krug addressed Control, al-

ready sixty miles behind them. But apparently Control had nothing to report. Everything was clear. And if no one had found Sigmond and Mellot by now, chances were that the offices would remain undisturbed until morning. By that time he'd be in Miami, and out of Krug's reach. Just how that would be arranged he didn't know, but a chance would come. It had to.

Graham shifted his strap, patting the pockets of the Brass uniform to see what he could discover. He'd had no time to take inventory. Here was his idento, here was a stunner, here a lumpy packet of what might be emergency rations or pacifiers—for all he knew, it could be Libidose. He had little idea of what constituted standard equipment for Brass assigned to flights like this. And he had little idea what he was supposed to know. The best thing to do would be to keep his mouth shut as much as possible and let Krug do the talking.

Krug seemed amenable to that arrangement. He talked over and around his hamsan.

"Desert country down there," he said. "Too dark to see, of course."

"No Domes?"

"We should be over Phoenix, now. Always fly the same route. Then there's nothing until Dallas. And after that, the Gulf."

"Gulf?"

"Gulf of Mexico, of course. Which reminds me." He leaned forward and tapped the co on

the shoulder. "Don't forget to give me the signal," he said.

The co nodded, then turned back to the panel. He and the pilot carried on a conversation of their own in low tones. Graham scarcely heard it. Another sound overrode; it came from the big passenger-area behind their cabin wall.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Socially Secured. They're singing."

And so they were. Graham strained, trying to distinguish the words of the ragged tune. All he could understand was something about *high in the sky we fly and life in the sun has just begun*.

"Traditional," Krug commented. "They always sing those things when they leave."

He fumbled for another hamsan. "Sure you don't want one?"

Graham nodded again. Krug gave him a worried glance. "What's the matter, stomach upset?"

"No. I'm just not hungry."

That didn't seem to be the right answer, because Krug continued to stare. "Wait a minute," he said. "Back there at Jetport, you were asking a lot of questions about the Socially Secured. You made some remark about why they weren't sorry to leave. Did somebody feed you some classified info?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've got some idea about what's going to happen?"

"No. What is going to happen?"

Krug's eyes were intent upon his face. Apparently he was satisfied with what he saw, because he turned away. "You'll see," he said. Again he leaned forward and spoke to the co. The co nodded briefly.

Krug leaned back in his seat. He reached over to the right wall of the cabin and pressed a button located unobtrusively below the lights. A faint hissing filled the air.

"What's that?" Graham inquired.

"Don't ask questions." Krug reached for a third hamsan.

All at once his voice seemed louder, and Graham realized why. The singing from the big cabin behind had died away. There was only the hissing.

"They've stopped," he murmured.

Krug nodded. "That's right."

"Anything the matter?"

"Nothing at all."

"Maybe we ought to step back and take a look."

"I wouldn't advise it."

"But—"

"Stay strapped. And don't try to open the door. That's an order! If any of the gas ever reached us in here we'd be finished."

"Gas?"

"Don't worry. I'm going to run the ejector now. I think they've had enough." Krug pressed another button, still munching his hamsan. "Only takes a minute to work, only takes another couple of minutes to purify the air again."

Graham felt the urgency rising in him: he knew it was wrong to speak, and yet he had to. "Aren't you going to tell me?" he asked. "Because if you can't, I'll have to guess. The gas—it does something to them, doesn't it? I mean, you're not just knocking them out. You're giving them a laundry-job, isn't that it? Affecting their memories?"

"Right." Krug finished his last bite and wiped his hands. "This stuff affects their memories, you might say. Permanently."

"Per—?"

"Might as well face it. We all have to, our first trip out. Remember the conditioning you got at school? The first time they locked you in with the corpses? That was all done with a purpose, boy. It was necessary, if you're going to be fit for this assignment. Because you're going to see a lot of corpses. To be exact, six hundred every trip."

"You—you killed them?"

Krug nodded.

Something snapped and Graham turned in his seat. He was reaching out when he saw Krug's hand, saw the stunner trained on his throat.

"Easy now," Krug was whispering. "Easy. I know how you feel. I think the bombed system's wrong, myself. I'm in favor of letting the trainees know before they go into flight. But the Psychos don't agree. They want it to come this way; want you to find out only when it's happened."

Graham didn't hear him. He was listening to a voice inside, a voice that screamed *I know now. I know about the vox-box. It's a fake. Some impersonator. You killed my father. He died this way, they all die this way, there is no Resort for the Socially Secured anywhere, it's all a lie, the whole system's a lie.*

And the stunner was ready, waiting; waiting for him to open his mouth. Because he couldn't open his mouth he opened his pores. For a moment he thought he was going to be sick.

Then Krug gripped his arm. "That's better," he said. "Just relax. Use your common sense and you'll understand that it has to be this way. We're running to capacity right now; how could we possibly support another thirty or forty million of non-productives? Turn them loose for fifty years to live in luxury and idleness? And what would they do—spend half a lifetime playing shuffleboard? This is the best way. Live fully, and die quickly and painlessly in happy anticipation."

"But it's—"

"Cruel? Barbaric? Inhuman?" Krug smiled wryly. "Go ahead, use the words if you like. I won't hold them against you. Felt the same way myself, at first. Guess we all do. It's only when you stop to think things out objectively that you realize what we do is necessary. And for the best." He paused. "You

know, they really tried to work out Resorts at first. They actually brought the Socially Secured down here. And the results were murder. Literally murder. Without Psychos to run things, they reverted, went right back to old-style civilization—complete with robbery, violence, even rape. Had to go in and exterminate whole colonies. Then they hit on this system, and there's been no trouble since."

He pointed at the left wall.
"See that button? Press it."

Graham hesitated. Krug leaned forward and tapped the co on the shoulder. "Over the Gulf?" he asked. The co nodded.

Krug turned to Graham again. "All right. Press it," he repeated.

"What happens when I press it?"

"Never mind. Do as you're told." His voice carried authority, and so did the pointing stunner.

Graham pressed.

There was a whoosh and a thudding roar from behind. The Jet jerked violently.

"What happened?" Graham asked.

"We just dumped our passengers. Into the Gulf of Mexico."

As Graham started, the hand came down on his arm again. "You did it," Krug reminded him. "You're a part of the system. Might as well get used to it."

Graham turned his face away. He felt his fingers ball into fists. Then Krug was standing up, un-

strapped. He put his audio-relay down on the seat.

"Hold it a minute," he said. "I'm going back to check the ship. Make sure everything's closed up again. I won't be gone long."

He edged into a passageway and shut the door.

Graham sat there alone, sat there thinking about what he had done; thinking about those who had just died, and about how his father had died. A whiff of gas and a plunge down into the dark waters—that was the end-result of fifty years of Planned Society. Lies, all lies, with this as the last lie of all. No, it didn't even end here. For Talents, there would be still more lies; the impersonators on the vox-box every week. *This* task was grim enough, the task of the executioner. But the impersonator's role was even worse. Studying old tapes and life-records, and then deceiving the survivors. Telling them to be happy, to adjust, to take it easy, relax, don't worry—

"Control to Krug."

The voice came from the empty seat beside him. Audio had been activated.

"Control to Krug. Stand by. Acknowledge. Emergency message. Repeat. Acknowledge and stand by for emergency message."

The metallic voice crackled in Graham's ears. Emergency message. That meant only one thing. They'd discovered Sigmund and

Mellot. They knew. And they were warning Krug.

Graham glanced behind him. Krug was still in the cabin, but he'd be back in a moment. Could the audio be turned off? No, because the pilots were listening too. It wouldn't help. He'd have to unstrap himself and get out the stunner.

But he couldn't stun the pilots, and if he stunned Krug they'd turn on him. Bomb it, why hadn't he planned things in advance? He ought to have anticipated that his luck wouldn't hold forever. And now there was no answer available, no escape.

Escape.

He started to unstrap and then remembered what Krug had said about the seat. It was an escape-chute. "Just press in emergency."

Well, this was an emergency if he ever saw one. With the audio squawking now, "Acknowledge!" and the sound of the door behind him opening slowly. Krug was coming, Krug was here, he was holding his stunner in one hand.

Graham took a deep breath. His thumb found the button on the side of his seat. It was now or never.

"What are you doing?" Krug began.

The rest of his sentence was drowned in the rush of air. The seat dropped from beneath Graham, and then he was dropping with it, turning over and over as he fell. The darkness was all around, coming up with a rush,

and he could see the phosphorescence whirling below.

Graham closed his eyes, then opened them. He'd have to dump the seat-chute before he landed. He was over water, and it would drag him down.

His fingers tugged frantically at the strap, but he was falling too fast, turning too quickly. Over and over and over, and the water rushing up, and the night closing in—

Then Graham screamed. He was still screaming as he followed the dumped dead down into the Gulf of Mexico.

CHAPTER 8

THE world was a woman's face. It was as small as a pinpoint, it was so huge it blotted out the sky; it wavered and receded, then came forward again only to fade once more.

Graham blinked and gradually the face came into focus and assumed normal proportions. It stared down at him with grave and questioning eyes, and he suddenly became conscious of the fact that he was flat on his back, lying very quietly on something that rocked back and forth, back and forth. The face began to bob again, then steadied once more. He opened his mouth, but before he could speak the woman anticipated.

"It's all right," she told him. "You're on a boat, you know. We pulled you out of the water."

"But—"

"You came down from a Jet,

didn't you? In a seat-chute? We saw the flare."

"What flare?"

"Don't you know every seat-chute has a flare attachment?"

Graham shook his head. "I didn't know. This was my first trip."

"What happened? Did something go wrong, was there some emergency? You're Brass, aren't you? I recognized the uniform. If you want me to report—"

"Please, don't. I can't talk now." Graham closed his eyes. Before he did so he caught the woman staring at him. It was an oddly guarded stare, but he seemed to sense surprise in her gaze, and puzzlement. Her voice, when she spoke, was oddly guarded, too.

"Don't try to exert yourself," she said. "Just rest, now. I'll give you a booster." She bent forward and her hand moved towards him. He felt a sudden sting, followed by a tingling, in his left arm. Then he went back into the darkness, but it was a rocking, gentle darkness that soothed his senses.

He slept for a long time. When he awoke he was instantly alert to broad daylight and a brisk breeze. He knew that he was lying on the deck of the small vessel—a primitive craft powered by an ancient petrocum motor. Out of the corner of his eye he stared down into a cabin where two men in nondescript uniforms piloted the boat.

Graham shifted his gaze and

blinked. The woman was still seated beside him. Her face was immobile, though the wind had unloosed the auburn torrent of her hair. She too wore the bulky and nondescript uniform of her male companions; there was no trace of makeup on her countenance and she didn't have glasses. Her face, as she bent forward, bore traces of small blemishes. Graham racked his memory to identify the discolorations. What did they call them? *Freckles*. That was it, freckles. People used to suffer from such dermatological afflictions in the days when they lived outside the Domes.

Outside the Domes. But he was outside, himself, now. Outside, on the rolling waters, in a small boat—

Graham sat up swiftly. The woman smiled at him.

"Don't be alarmed. You're quite safe, Graham."

He stared at her. "You know my name?"

"Of course. It's our job to keep contact with the Jets. Krug relayed an alert to us. We were looking for you." She paused. "My name is Clare."

Graham nodded at her. *You're quite safe, Graham.* It was an ironic self-contradiction. If she knew his name, then he wasn't safe. She had captured him, Krug knew where he was, and they both knew *who* he was. They had found out all about Mellot, now, and Sigmond, too. There was no escape. *Or was there?* He glanced out at the blue

emptiness of the surrounding sea. *No escape.*

"Don't worry," Clare said. "We'll be reaching the Keys soon."

"The Keys?"

"We're based there, of course. This is only a small part of our duties—when a Jet consignment comes over, we're on hand to patrol the area. Sometimes, when a cargo is—dumped—there are accidents."

Graham raised his eyebrows. Clare glanced away as she continued.

"Every so often there's a slip-up. One of the Socially Secured may revive upon reaching the water. That's where we function. We, and the crews of a dozen similar boats, comb the area for such survivors—"

"And kill them?" Graham muttered.

Clare said nothing. She continued to stare out at the water.

"Why didn't you kill me?" he asked. "You said yourself that Krug gave you a report."

"That's the reason," she answered. "He told us to bring you back and await further orders."

Graham shook his head. "But the report must have come in while I was asleep. I seem to recall that when you spoke to me last night, the first time, you said you didn't know who I was."

"Correct."

"Why didn't you kill me then? In fact, why did you bother to fish me out of the water at all?" There was something both incongruous and unconvincing in

her statements, and he tried to formulate it as he spoke. "You say you search for survivors and finish them off. I should think the sea would do the job quite efficiently—or the sharks."

Clare sighed. "Yes," she murmured. "There are sharks, everywhere."

"You haven't answered my questions."

"I don't intend to. You can ask Doc, when we arrive."

"Doc? Who's he?"

"He's in charge."

"Brass?"

"Psycho."

Graham stood up. If there were puzzling elements in the situation, her last word resolved it. He was being taken back into custody by the Psychos, and that could mean only one thing. He'd be better off taking his chances with the sharks.

He glanced covertly at the water. Land loomed off on the southern horizon—it was probably one of the Keys. Maybe it was a Psycho center, maybe not. Would it be possible to make a break, swim for it, attempt to hide there? It was worth the risk, in any case. Anything was better than falling into the hands of the Psychos again.

He gazed down into the cabin. The two men seemed entirely preoccupied. No one was watching him except the woman, and she was unarmed. Now was the time. If he could knock her out—

Graham stretched, flexing his arms as if yawning. He felt rest-

ed, refreshed, ready for anything. Yes, he could do it. He knew he could. And he had to. Now.

Suddenly he lashed out, his right hand grasping her hair, his left arm closing about her throat. His fingers tightened across her neck and he bent her back, and then—

Her hands locked behind her, closing around the back of his neck. His feet left the deck, and then he was whirling through the air. Before he knew what had happened he was jarred into painful realization as he landed on the hard surface with a thump that knocked the wind out of his lungs.

Clare stood over him stolidly, then tossed her hair back over her shoulders and smiled faintly. "Please don't try anything like that again," she said, crisply, "or I'll have to use force."

"Force? What do you call that?"

All at once the faint smile blossomed into an unmistakable grin. "Judo," she explained. "Doc taught me."

"You must have been a good pupil." He stirred, and ran his right hand across his bruised shoulders.

"Here, I'll help you up," Clare said. "If you'll promise not to make a break for it."

"I guess there's no choice, is there?" Graham allowed her to assist him, taking her hand as she pulled him to his feet. Her clasp was warm and unfeminine-

ly firm. He prepared to release his grip but she held him firm and bent her head closer to his own.

"Hold it," she whispered. "They can see us from below, through the mirror. Pretend you're dizzy and lean on me. Now listen carefully. I know why you tried to escape, of course. And I suppose I should have told you sooner. You were right when you questioned my motives in saving you. We don't ordinarily rescue anyone—our job is merely to police and patrol these waters. But Doc has other plans in mind. You'll just have to trust him, and trust me. Now, will you promise to behave?"

Graham nodded. "Then he's not really a Psycho?"

"Oh, he's a Psycho—but there is more to it than that. Wait and see."

Clare stepped away. "Look," she said. "We're coming in!"

The boat chugged along a reef and entered the island harbor. Through the trees bordering the beach Graham caught a glimpse of a cluster of buildings, unprotected by any semblance of a Dome.

Slowly they moved towards a crude wooden dock, and all at once the engines slowed and stilled as they drifted in. One of the men clambered up from the cabin and ran across the deck, vaulting the rail to the dock below. He secured the boat with a rope. His companion left the wheel and spoke to Clare, who nodded.

The two men led the way. Graham and Clare followed, taking a path across the beach which led to a series of stone steps. They ascended, and came to a courtyard fronting a semicircle of steel and concrete structures, all of which seemed to have solid glass window-walls on the side facing the courtyard. Graham recognized the screen arrangements over the glass; visibility would be perfect from within, but it was impossible to see what lay behind from outside here. Architecturally, the buildings would not have been out of place in Hollywood, but this was not surprising; hadn't Clare said there was a Psycho in charge of the Key? He'd just have to trust her, from now on.

Oddly enough, he did. She was smiling reassuringly now, urging him forward as they approached the outer door. Something buzzed and clicked—electronic protector threshold, Graham realized—and then the door slid open. The two men entered and turned down a corridor to the left. Clare grasped his arm and guided him to the right, through a long hall which resembled a corridor back in Technoquarters. Everything was white and shining—Psycho-white, Psycho-shining.

Clare halted before a doorway. "Don't worry, now," she whispered. Her voice was lost in the buzzing and clicking as the electronic guardian acknowledged their presence and activated the lock-mechanisms. The door

moved to one side and they entered the office. A white-gowned figure gazed at them from behind a desk.

"Here we are," Clare said, gaily. "Mission accomplished."

The Psycho stood up, nodding slowly. As his eyes met Graham's, he was conscious of seeing in them the same curious look of shocked recognition he'd noted in Clare's glance. The impression lasted for only an instant and then a veil came down. It wasn't actually a veil, but at the moment Graham was reminded of a lizard he had once seen sunning itself upon a stone; the reptile had seemed to draw a film over its gaze.

There was something remote and reptilian about this little man in the white robe. Suddenly Graham was conscious of a cold tingle of apprehension. He'd felt it before, that other time, when he'd reached out and touched the lizard. The lizard had flicked its tongue suddenly and moved away.

The Psycho flicked his tongue. "So you're Graham," he murmured. "I'm glad to see you. In fact, we're both glad to see you—aren't we, Krug?"

Graham whirled, suddenly, raising his arm lest Clare try to intercept him. The girl made no movement. And Graham, after turning, halted and stood still.

Krug stood directly behind him, his eyes levelled on Graham's face and his stunner levelled at his forehead.

"Very glad," Krug said. "Very glad indeed." He smiled at Clare. "But I'm a little surprised, too. I'd have thought this one might have put up more of a struggle. He's disturbed, you know."

Clare nodded. "I took care of that. I persuaded him it was all a trick designed to deceive you. After that he was quite cooperative. I imagine he thought Doc here would save him."

"And so I shall." The Psycho's lizard-tongue licked at thin lips.

Graham faced the girl. "Bomb you! Why didn't you let me go over the side? At least I'd have had a quick death."

"You aren't to die," Clare told him. "Doc gave me my orders."

"And Krug gave me mine," the Psycho said.

"And Sigmund himself instructed me," Krug added. He grinned slowly. "We bear you no malice, Graham. So there will be no punishment. Only an adjustment."

"Adjustment?" Despite himself, Graham could not repress the note of pleading in his voice. "I don't want that. Believe me, I'd rather die—"

"Sigmund knows best," Krug said. "As far as I'm concerned, I'd be only too happy to eliminate you. But Sigmund insisted otherwise. You're a Talent, remember? And Talents are too scarce to be destroyed. Years have been invested in training you, and we can't afford to be cheated of your creative poten-

tial. You'll be re-assigned to a project after a proper period of Therapy."

"Therapy? You mean I'm going to be laundered, is that it?"

"We'll leave the matter up to Doc, here. He's in charge." Krug grinned again. "Actually, it's lucky in a way that you bailed out when and where you did—made it all very convenient. Unless Sigmund chose to treat you in Hollywood, chances are we'd have flown you down here anyway as a second choice. Doc gets a lot of special cases, don't you, Doc?"

The lizard-tongue flicked once more from between the smiling, parted lips. "That is correct."

Graham paled. "You mean this is a—Womb?"

"Please." The Psycho raised a hand. "Let us not descend to vulgarities, Graham. It is enough for you to know that you are now an inmate of an Insanatorium."

Smiling graciously, he raised his hand in a languid motion and at the same time Graham felt Krug's stunner beam him in the back.

CHAPTER 9

THE room was light and airy. Graham could glance out of the window at the ocean, or gaze through the door down the long corridor beyond, and there was no sense of confinement—unless, of course, he attempted to open either the window or the door. The glass was quite immov-

able, and beyond it were the meshed screens.

Food came up at regular intervals through the wall servitor. The furnishings were more than comfortable. In a way, it was as pleasant here as in his own apartment.

When he'd recovered consciousness, he found a fresh supply of clothing laid out for him on the bed, and an ample wardrobe in the wall closet. Somebody had also seen fit to provide him with sigs, and during the second day of his enforced stay he began to indulge in smoking. He'd never tried them before, but of course he knew what they were—oral-erotic tabagistic pacifiers, named in honor of Sigmund Freud, of course, who had smoked *sigs* in the olden, golden days.

But the biggest novelty lurked in the cupboards, which Graham investigated thoroughly on the second evening of his captivity.

They were filled with books. Actual *books*, bound and printed by ancient processes; their pages yellowed and crumbling now, but still legible. Quite legible, in fact. Graham thus found one of his wildest fantasies come true—and without further ado, he settled down to an orgy of unbridled reading.

It was all pornography, of course, things he'd heard of vaguely but never seen and not quite believed in; filthy stuff by writers named Asimov and Heinlein and Bradbury which

had once been openly peddled under the guise of "science fiction." Despite his initial qualms, Graham found the material quite interesting from the clinical standpoint. After all, hadn't his own work—Space Opera—originally sprung from just such outmoded and obscene sources? That's the way he'd always understood it.

But he could see why these sources had been outlawed. The writing was suggestive in the extreme; consciously permeated with inhibition, repression, compulsion and obvious symbolism. It was unmistakably a product of the unclean mental attitudes of the Twentieth Century, teeming with quaint, old-fashioned, but nevertheless dangerous notions. For example, the idea of space-travel was completely perverted—these writers, while not minimizing the potential dangers, apparently did their best to make the idea sound *attractive!* They also speculated on time-travel, and all from the standpoint of escapist fantasy. Some of the absurd attempts at prophecy, involving visions of a future peopled by "robots" and "cybernetics machines" were quite ludicrous in the light of actuality, but in other respects Graham could trace the genesis of many concepts practically paralleled in today's Space Opera. The Bems were here, for example. Yes, as a technician, as a Talent, he had to admit the ancient pornographers deserved

credit for their imaginative efforts. It was their viewpoint which was warped and dangerous.

Throughout everything seemed to run absurd fantasies of omnipotence. The "heroes" were supposedly brilliant or at least superior intellects who nevertheless reacted to stress in terms of physical aggression throughout the narratives. They kept coming back for more punishment repeatedly and even when exhausted they seemed capable of one last superhuman effort which resulted in ultimate triumph. It was a monstrous concept of humanity, but Graham found it oddly attractive, in a way. That was the danger, of course; the temptation to identify with such atypicalities. Such a "hero" would never, for example, allow himself to become involved in Graham's present predicament. He would have easily overcome that girl, Clare, and taken over the boat; sailed for some deserted island and escaped to—

Where?

That was the difference between pornography and reality; there was no escape afforded in the latter. No "underground" of rebels waiting to overthrow authority. No wonder "science fiction" had been repressed and repudiated, along with the rest of the old-fashioned "literature"; entirely too much of it dealt with fantasies of aggression directed against authority. And a great deal seemed to con-

cern criticism of social attitudes and the social order. Of course, as Graham realized, most of the criticism had been perfectly justified; the point was that this form of writing could be employed by almost anyone as a weapon against any form of authority. Therein lay the real danger.

Why had *he* been allowed access to this material? This disturbed him.

The question remained unanswered. For five full days, Graham saw no one. There was nothing to do but read. And so he read. Day dimmed to darkness and darkness dwindled into dawn, but still he was alone. No figures appeared against the landscape beyond the window, no faces loomed in the corridor past the doorway. The longer he waited, the more apprehensive he became, and the more he took refuge from apprehension in the books. Perhaps that's the way it had happened in the old days, when everybody read. They read because they were afraid; because they couldn't stand the strain of waiting for the bombs to fall. But the ideas that brought the bombs were generated and nurtured by the concepts in the books, and the more they read the more they ripened to aggression and rebellion. It was a vicious cycle—no wonder the Psychos had outlawed all that pornographic trash! Now the world was clean and sane—

And they dumped the Socially

Secured in the sea. Was that clean and sane?

Graham was still pondering the answer when Doc paid him a visit.

The Psycho appeared outside the door on the morning of the sixth day and gestured with his hand. The door slid open and the small man entered. Since the gesturing hand held a stunner, Graham made no effort to approach him.

Doc nodded down and smiled, but the lizard-tongue did not appear.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Confused," Graham answered, truthfully. He glanced towards the cupboards. "Reading those books I found—"

"They were placed here for that purpose," Doc said. "I hope you got a few ideas from them."

"But I don't understand. This is a Womb, isn't it? I'm going to be laundered—"

"I was expecting the books to do the job," Doc said. "I thought they might help in reorientation."

"Pornography?"

"It used to be called fantasy," Doc reminded him. "But under any label, it's still the best approach to understanding current realities that I know."

"What has an Insanatorium got to do with realities?"

"Not much, in Hollywood or most of the other centers. But down here, we've learned to go our own way. The books have helped us immeasurably, I can

assure you. So many of them dealt with tyrannies of the future, and possible rebellions against such tyrannies. No wonder they were banned, labelled pornographic. Anyone reading them would be bound to find certain parallels with the present situation. Didn't you?"

Graham hesitated a moment. Then, "What do I have to lose?" he murmured. "Of course I did."

"Very well," said Doc. "Consider yourself laundered." He slipped the stunner into his jacket and sat down.

"But—"

"I told you we didn't operate the way they would in Hollywood. Sigmond thinks we do, of course, and we try to keep him satisfied. That's why we had to go through with that little comedy the other night, for Krug's benefit. He'll report to Sigmond that you've been captured and will be given the full treatment. That means you're safe here for at least a few more weeks. By that time we'll be ready to act."

"Wait a minute. What are you trying to tell me?"

"Just what you should already have surmised from reading those books. That you're in the hands of the rebels."

"Underground?"

"Why not?" Doc shrugged. "Don't you think it's a good idea? You know now that this whole social order is built upon a lie. You saw what happened to the Socially Secured. Isn't it

worthwhile to step in and change things?"

"Yes, but how can *you* expect to do anything?"

Doc lit a sig. "I've been asking that question for years," he confessed. "When I came here, to take charge, I was armed with nothing but vague doubts. After I discovered the truth about the Socially Secured, those doubts were crystallized. What Clare told you is partly true. There's no Brass base in this outlying area, beyond the Domes, and one of my duties as Psycho in charge is to send out boats when the Socially Secured flights come over—to make sure that no one escapes by any freak accident after being dumped.

"Well, I send out the boats, but on rescue missions. We can't save many; most of them are quite dead before they hit the water. But through the past ten years we've managed to bring in and revive over a hundred. Some of them are good recruits.

"Then too, I'm in charge of four other Insanatoriums in this region, in addition to this one here. I've managed to pick up some interesting additions to our ranks. There are well over three hundred of us, now."

Graham blinked. "Three hundred, to deal with His MGMinence, and Sigmond? People like Hix and Ormsbee and Schwartz, and the millions behind them? They control everything from the top—"

Doc raised his hand. "You

needn't tell me. After all, I *am* a Psycho. I know the setup very well. And as you say, it is controlled most efficiently from the top. Nothing of importance is delegated. This is its greatest strength, and also its greatest weakness. Since the whole system depends upon holding the media of communication and information, all we need do is take over on that level."

"But how can you expect to do it with three hundred old men and maniacs?"

"They aren't maniacs. Forget the orthodox Psycho definitions of aberration. All the values have been inverted, all the standard psychiatric precepts perverted. Today the Insanatoriums are virtually the last refuge of the sane. If they haven't all been subject to shock-therapy and topectomy and lobotomy, just to dull them into submission. It's been years since psychotherapy has been used as a curative—the principal purpose of all therapy has been merely to destroy rebellion. No, some of our best minds, our most creative minds, are in Insanatoriums. I've utilized their abilities, set up a few laboratories. We aren't quite as helpless as you may imagine."

"You're talking about war, then? You have new weapons to destroy the Domes?" Graham shook his head. "Frankly, I doubt if the end would justify the means."

"I doubted it, too, for many years, when that seemed to be

the only way. Lately, other avenues have opened. But I wasn't certain of our plans until you arrived."

"What have I got to do with it?"

"You're quite important," Doc smiled. "In a month or so, you'll be supposedly laundered and fit to return to duty. When the next flight comes down over the Gulf to dump, you'll be able to return with them to Hollywood. That's the way we'll work it—through infiltration. You can handle the matter from the inside—"

Graham shook his head. "Nonsense! You've been reading too much of that pornography. One man against the Galactic Empire, eh?" He stood up. "Look, I'm in sympathy with your ideas. I'd like to see the present order overthrown. But I'm not going to tackle the job. If you don't mind, I intend to help all I can, but from right here."

"Very well," Doc said. "You'll stay. But you'll go."

"I don't understand—"

"I told you we'd managed some rather clever innovations in our laboratory work, with the help of the technicians we recruited. I also told you that you're quite important to the success of this plan. But perhaps the best way to make things utterly clear is through actual demonstration. I asked to have Considine sent up here, and I believe he's waiting outside now."

Doc stepped over to the door. It slid open and he beckoned to a waiting figure outside.

The man stepped into the room.

"This is Considine," Doc said.

Graham heard the name, but he didn't believe him. He kept staring at the smiling stranger before him—the stranger who wasn't a stranger.

"Pretty good job, eh?" Doc asked. "Now are you beginning to understand how we'll work it? Naturally, I expect you to brief Considine here very thoroughly in the weeks to come. He'll have to become completely acquainted with all the necessary data—you must cooperate all along the line. Then, when the time comes, he'll be ready. Once he arrives in Hollywood, he knows what to do. It's your job to see that he can manage to carry out his duties undetected."

Doc smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "No reason why you shouldn't get started right away. From now on, you two will stay together; there's no time for delay. I've no doubt you'll get along well with one another. After all, you have a great deal in common."

Then he made his exit, and left Graham standing there, staring at Considine. What he had said was all too true; they *did* have a lot in common. The trouble was, Graham couldn't accept the stranger as Considine. The name just didn't fit.

Graham thought of the old books and shuddered.

Call him robot. Call him android.

Whatever he was, however he had been created—feature for feature, the creature named Considine was Graham's identical twin.

CHAPTER 10

I'M NO monster," Considine insisted. "I'm as human as you are. Here, feel my arm. It's flesh, isn't it?"

"But your face—"

"There was a natural resemblance to begin with. A little cosmetological work and some makeup helped. The big job now is to do as good a job on the inside as was done on the exterior. That's where you come in. You're going to have to tell me all about yourself. And about your life in Laguna Dome." Considine smiled. "There's a lot to catch up on—it's been some years since I was Socially Secured."

"Doc rescued you?"

"That's right."

"What did you do—beforehand? Back there?"

"We'll discuss it some other time. Right now, there's too much I've got to find out from you and we haven't got much time. Doc insists that you give me every bit of data you can remember; nothing is too trivial and inconsequential to be important. Names, dates, conversations, experiences you shared with others, details of your daily life and work."

"Think you can remember everything?"

"He'll supply us with a recording device."

"Tape or film?"

"Something new. One of his patients, a man named Lawrence, came up with it. I'll have it brought in. Don't be afraid, now."

Graham wasn't afraid, but he was a bit selfconscious when he saw the hypnotape. Considine set up the apparatus on a table; they took chairs on either side, and then adjusted the head-clamps and electrodes.

"You may find it easier to talk, at first," Considine said. "But just remember, you really don't have to. All that's necessary is that you think, that you remember. It's based on the free-association principle, of course. Electroencephalographic patterns are set up mechanically; the machine analyzes the rhythms, yours and mine, and then plots a sort of median beam, a common frequency we can both approximate. You'll be on sending, I'll be on receiving, so of course I can't signal any questions. I'll just depend on you transmitting your reveries. If anything needs clarifying or supplementing, I can ask you for additional data after a session."

"But why is it called a hypnotape?" Graham asked. "Isn't it just mechanical thought-transmission?"

"There's a built-in signal, through the electrodes, to focus attention," Considine explained. "The result is definitely a hypnotic state on the part of both

sender and receiver. This makes for maximum concentration, maximum ability to absorb impressions and information. But don't worry about being caught in a trance. The device can be set to break connection at any time. To begin with, I believe we ought to limit our sessions to an hour. Later on, when you're more relaxed, we can extend the length of contact if it seems advisable. Now don't worry—the important thing is to use the machine just as it would be used in therapy; for imparting thoughts to the analyst through free fantasy. Let yourself go."

It wasn't quite that simple, Graham told himself. To begin with, he had to accept the notion that such a transference was mechanically possible. Then he remembered how Sigmund had used the Ganz method on him, to make the filmanalysis. That had worked, worked only too well. Graham shuddered as he sank back in his chair, heard the device click on.

The funny part of it was, the device clicked on *inside* his head. He closed his eyes to concentrate, and felt a stirring beneath his skull. Little waves of horripilation coursed through him, and then an alien rhythm obtruded. It was strong, steady, and oddly soothing. Somewhere *outside* he could feel himself relaxing. There was no need to open his eyes and look around, no desire to. He could rest just by surrendering to the rhythm, and he wasn't afraid any more.

The rhythm was slow and peaceful, slow and peaceful . . .

And he didn't have to talk, all he had to do was think. Think about anything that came into his head. About Zank, and about Warner. About his friends—Carson, Davis, Loeb. About his father, down in Gulfport, who wasn't really down in Gulfport at all but who had gone down in the Gulf. Down in the Gulf with the Socially Secured, because of Krug and men like Krug, the rats. Men like Archer, his MGMinence. MGMenace. Menace, the Bems in his work . . .

He thought about his work, about his day-to-day routine back there under the Dome. He recalled his conversations with Zank, his talks with Wanda. No feeling of embarrassment now. He could recollect every detail. All the little things, things he had consciously forgotten, fell into place. He even remembered the individual movements of that new *Psychiatric Suite*; they were *Trauma*, *Catherix*, *Catharsis* and *Adjustment*. He thought about the Fornivacation and Wanda's glasses and his last job turned out for *Space Opera* . . .

Click!

Something shut off in his head, and the session was over. He had a moment of confusion, and then everything was all right once again. There was no self-consciousness, no aftermath of fatigue.

Considine was jubilant. He began talking at once, and now

Graham was really startled; out of the mouth of his double poured his own thoughts, his own memories, literally verbatim.

"You see?" Considine exulted. "It really does work. Now, I've got a few points I'd like to ask questions about—"

And he did, thus establishing a routine to which they both adhered during the days and weeks that followed. Aside from the hypnotic influence of the machine, there was something definitely compelling about the very process of self-revelation. By opening his mind and memories to Considine, Graham found that he was in turn becoming acquainted with himself.

Once, when Doc stopped by to check on their progress, he said as much. "This is a wonderful adjunct to psychotherapy," he told him.

"I hope it will be," Doc answered. "If we ever return to *genuine* therapeutic concepts again. Right now, of course, they use plenty of narcohypnosis and subliminal suggestion, but only for purposes of control."

"How did it all start, anyway?" Graham demanded. But Doc shook his head.

"Can't go into that now. No time. Later on, perhaps, we'll have more chance to talk."

Graham didn't wait for that opportunity to arise. During the third and final week of their daily sessions, he spoke to Considine about it.

They had reached a point

where his double was reasonably satisfied with the progress they'd made; for several days, Considine had ceased using the machine and instead improvised a series of testing-periods, during which Graham fired questions and he supplied the answers.

"I don't think they'll ever be able to trip me up now," Considine said. "I know as much about you as you do yourself."

"Probably more," Graham admitted. "I've recovered a lot of latent memories. And I'm grateful for them. You know, when Sigmund made his filmanalysis, everything seemed so horrible—the infantile period especially. It's as though he dredged up only the negative concepts; the fears, the blind aggressions, the feelings of inadequacy and insecurity."

"That's all he wanted to find," Considine suggested. "He edited out the rest. Your feelings about your father, for example."

"My father." Graham smiled. "Lewis was a great man. You must have noticed how many of my pleasant recollections center about him."

"Yes, I did notice," Considine said, softly. "You miss him, don't you?"

"Terribly." Graham stood up, fumbling for a sig. "Oh, I know what such an admission would mean to the average Psycho. But I'm not ashamed. If I could only be half the man my father was—" He faced Considine abruptly. "Why wouldn't they

let me? Why won't they let anyone develop in the old patterns? How did it all start, when did it change, why?"

Considine pointed upwards, his finger gesturing towards the window and stabbing at the sky.

"Bombs," he said. "They brought more than physical destruction—they brought psychic destruction, too. The panic resulting from wholesale atomic and biological warfare caught the military and the industrialists unprepared. And the psychiatrists, already culture-heroes and authority-symbols in the 1960s, took over. Actually, they were already in key positions. During the war, they nominally controlled all media of communication—the press, television, motion pictures, radio. Quaint devices, primitive by our standards, but quite effective for "psychological warfare" and completely controlled by government psychologists in charge of censorship and propaganda.

"During the ensuing confusion after the war, they merely retained control, and augmented their positions of authority. As for so-called private industry, by this time almost every executive had his own personal analyst; these men merely pooled their influence and took over smoothly to dictate policy. First they acted in an advisory capacity and then, as more and more so-called 'bosses' or 'big wheels' cracked under the strain, the therapists

moved into open control of business channels. You know something of what followed, I'm sure.

"The Declaration of Dependence abolished old-style political government, and the Psychos set out to establish a 'sane' world free of war and individual threats of aggression. Their initial premise seemed sound enough. They pinpointed the sources of tension in the familial situation, romantic love, competitive economics, competitive religion, nationalism. Using fear of technology and physical sciences as potential threats of future war, they developed new concepts based on a therapeutic social order. 'Sanity' became equated with 'adjustment' and what was that but conformity and obedience to Psycho dictates?

"There wasn't much attempt to develop psychiatry or psychoanalysis any further. While it had once been freely admitted that mental therapy was still in the experimental stage, it was now postulated that the Science of the Mind was exact and ordained. They freely discarded anything which seemed contradictory or obscure; there was no more experimentation with ESP or PSI, for example. A lot of the work of Freud, Adler, Jung and the others was ignored or actually suppressed. This wasn't too difficult, because by this time they'd started banning books and distorting the educational process. Narmohypnosis, perfected during the war, was a great aid

to power. Birth-conditioning followed. Subliminal perception was freely employed—but I needn't tell you that, I'm sure.

"What gradually evolved was a drugged society. The Domes were built, to protect survivors from radioactivity, and no one hostile to the Psychos was permitted asylum in them. The rebels stayed outside and perished.

"Within the Domes, the new era really began. Atomic power and jet propulsion were developed, hydroponics became a necessary survival-technique, but no free research was permitted in the field of physical sciences. Rocket and space-flight experiments ended, because they were associated with weapons and the threat of destruction. There was an end to 'free enterprise' and 'communism' alike, for the same reason. The surviving population was conditioned to believe they lived in a world without war, murder, suicide or aberration. Here in the Ideal States of America, the worker started out with birth-conditioning for immediate adjustment, lived as a ward of the state in a univercity, graduated to a farmarea or industarea, dwelt in a suburban-nex, visited consumarkets for pleasure, and ended up Socially Secured at fifty."

"Murder," said Graham, softly. "Living a lie and dying a lie."

"Remember they're not villains," Considine answered. "They tried to cope with a real situation as best they knew. The

panic after the war created an emergency; someone had to take immediate and decisive action. Military and civil authorities failed, so the medical authorities took over. Building the Domes was a great initial achievement, and a necessity, too. Two-thirds of the entire country, three-quarters of the entire world, was seared by radioactivity. Epidemics wiped out virtually the entire population of Europe, Asia, South America—wherever survivors huddled in masses. The Domes brought physical security. The Psychos imposed a secure social order. They tried to rebuild society along idealistic lines. But they had to work too fast, there wasn't enough to work with.

"Did you know that they did try to establish colonies for the Socially Secured at first, here in the south? But they lacked the necessary manpower, the necessary industrial output to support the project. It was too expensive, so eventually they just set up the present system."

"But why did they *have* to? Why enforce retirement at fifty? Why not let men live out their natural span?" Graham demanded. "They can open the Domes now. The threat of radioactivity is over. This country could support a larger population."

"I don't know," Considine sighed. "I really don't know. You'll have to ask somebody else."

A few weeks beforehand, this suggestion would have seemed

absurd to Graham. But he was no longer a prisoner, now. After his daily sessions with Considine, he found he was free to come and go as he pleased.

Life in the Insanatorium and on the Key was complex. Graham found that Doc hadn't lied: he and his people, here and in the neighboring institutions on adjoining Keys, had set up an elaborate system of experimentation and preparation. Behind the protective regimen of Psycho control, which was maintained solely for the purpose of deceiving visiting Brass, the rebel group was determined and dedicated. Each month the boats went out when the jets went over, and each month Krug or his counterparts paid a courtesy-call or made a perfunctory tour of inspection. There was never anything amiss; during these interludes the patients were kept in confinement, the Psychos and Technos and Egghead personnel went about their accustomed duties. But in between, there were no distinctions and no pretenses of maintaining an Insanatorium — except, of course, when Doc made his regular telereports to headquarters in the East or out in Hollywood.

Doc (whose real name, Graham discovered, was Lee) explained the situation tersely. "It didn't happen overnight," he said. "Took years to gradually transform an actual Insanatorium into the present pattern. Had to weed out a lot of the former

personnel here. A few we indoctrinated. Others we—eliminated." He zipped a finger across his throat and smiled, not at all pleasantly. "We've had to lie and cheat and steal and smuggle in material for our lab work. Built 'em underground, of course. And for a long time we didn't have sufficient staff-members to function. But we've recruited patients and survivors, as I told you, and for the past few years there's been no problem."

"But are you sure no one suspects?"

"Fairly certain. After all, we do effect some 'cures' here. That's a necessary safe-guard, you know —every month or so, we get new patients for treatment. The majority, I'm happy to say, are like yourself; Talents and other non-conformists. Most of them are quite eager to enlist in the cause. The others—" Doc made the zipping gesture again.

"Some of the Talents we retain, as incurables. Others we 'cure' and send back to their former posts. So you see, the process of infiltration has already begun. All over the Domes, in various capacities, we have men working and waiting. They each know what to do when the time comes. What we needed, though, was someone like yourself—a man who could get into Hollywood. Being away from that area, our Insanatoriums never got any Talents who were stationed around there. And we need at least one, to work on the top level. He'll set everything off according to plan."

"Just what is your plan? I still don't see—"

"It's better that you don't, at the moment. Considine knows what his role will be. We did a good job on him, didn't we?"

"Remarkable. I still can't get over the resemblance. For that matter, I don't understand—"

"Sorry." Doc's voice was brusque. "Too busy, now. I'll explain another time."

Graham had no doubt that he spoke the truth. Doc was indeed busy. Everyone was very active and busy here.

A trip through the underground laboratory areas convinced him of that much.

Clare took him through. She was spending as much time as possible with him these days—whenever he wasn't occupied in sessions with Considine, and whenever she could get away from her clerical staff-work as one of Doc's assistants.

She introduced him to a number of men working on the lab projects, and Graham soon realized that Doc hadn't lied about their abilities. There were Technos and Talents from Domes throughout the eastern area, and a surprising number of men and women over fifty.

At first Graham found himself uneasy in their presence. Clare noticed, of course, and commented upon it.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked, after an interview with a gray-haired Techno who had been explaining his work on sen-

sory tracks for a Realie. "You were scarcely civil to that man."

"I can't help it," Graham confessed. "It's just that I'm not used to being around senile people."

"Senile? He's only fifty-six."

"Nobody's that old, except on top level. And he seemed so nervous."

"Nervous? You'd be nervous, too—remember what he's been through! He was gassed, dropped into the sea, and drowning when our boat picked him up two years ago. He really needed genuine therapy from Doc when he arrived here. But there's certainly nothing seriously wrong with him now—you seem to have been impressed by what he told you about his work."

"Of course, I was impressed," Graham admitted. "The whole setup is impressive. Why, you've got a technical staff here that can turn out Realies to compete with anything they do in Hollywood! Just duplicating the necessary equipment must have been a major job—nobody's allowed to even touch the machinery in the Domes except the Technos directly in charge. Why, I've been a Talent for years and half of the instruments here I was never permitted to see at Laguna."

"The people you call senile are the ones who built them for us," Clare said.

"But why? What's their purpose? Are you making Realies here?"

"Not yet," the girl answered. "When the time comes—"

"Can't you tell me what the plans are?"

Clare shook her head.

She shook it again when Graham, wandering through the underground labyrinth of air-conditioned passages, attempted to enter a doorway at the far end of a remote passage.

"We can't go in there," she explained. "Off limits."

"Off limits? But why?"

"Medical research. Their labs are separated." She smiled and took his hand. "Now, don't ask me what kind of research they're doing, because I'm not allowed to answer that, either. Doc will explain, soon."

Graham got the same evasive answer from Considine, during their next session together.

"That's not my department," he said. "Let Doc tell you. It all ties in with the plan."

"Plan!" Graham scowled. "That's all I hear about—this mysterious 'plan'. How can he expect to take over the Domes and upset the established order from down here? What's he doing, trying to invent some kind of death-ray, some secret weapon out of those old science fiction books? Maybe Doc needs a little therapy himself."

"Perhaps you do," Considine said, gently. "Why don't you go to Doc and ask him?"

In the end, that's just what Graham did.

He confronted the older man in his own office-apartments the following evening.

"Good to see you," Doc said. "I was just about to suggest we get together for a talk. According to reports received today, the time for action has arrived. And our plans call for—"

"Your plans?" Graham grimaced. "I suppose I was right. You've come up with some kind of secret weapon, haven't you? A secret weapon to destroy the system?"

"Indeed we have," said Doc.

"What is it, anti-gravity? A disintegrator? Are you going to blast the Domes? Remember, I'm a Talent. I know all about Mad Scientists. Oh, I think I've already guessed your precious plan. You intend to send Considine back to Laguna in my place, smuggle him into Hollywood from there, and let him blow the whole place to bits. He'll have the secret weapon, won't he?"

Doc nodded, smiling. "You're partially right, of course," he answered. "We do intend to send Considine back as your substitute, and we do expect him to get to Hollywood—I'm sure Sigmond would insist on a personal interview with a Talent before considering it safe to restore him to active duty. But there won't be any melodramatic nonsense about blowing the place to bits."

"I thought you admitted Considine will have the secret weapon?"

"And so he shall," Doc said. "The only weapon that can possibly destroy the present order."

"What kind of a weapon is that?"

"Haven't you discovered that for yourself yet?" Doc smiled again. "The secret weapon is—Youth!"

CHAPTER 11

LET me put it this way," Doc said. "When psychologists and social scientists attempted to analyze the sources of aggression, back in the old days, they missed the really important one. Probably because they were so closely involved in the pattern themselves that they were unable to realize just how all-encompassing it was. Whatever the reasons, they *did* miss. They failed to recognize that the basic struggle in old-fashioned society was not that of Capital *versus* Labor, or Male *versus* Female, or Civil Authority *versus* Military Authority, or even Science *versus* Religion.

"The big clash was simply Youth *versus* Age.

"It must have started about the same time as psychology-worship, over a hundred years ago. It was largely the work of the old radio-television-motion picture-advertising cliques. Slowly but surely, at first probably by accident and then more and more consciously and deliberately, they created a Youth Cult here in the old United States of America. They made a fetish of adolescence.

"You can see it in their ancient films, their ancient books, their ancient advertisements; the theme is implicit and unmistakable.

Nothing worthwhile, according to this premise, ever happened to 'old people' or the 'middle-aged'. All romance, adventure and achievement were the province and prerogative of youth alone. Back in the middle years of the Twentieth Century, everyone wanted, above all else, to 'look young'. It was an age of crew-cut hair styles, of juvenile slang, of music written for and by adolescents and delivered by adolescents to celebrate adolescent supremacy. Business, industry and the armed forces all solicited youth, but offered little opportunity to any newcomer over the age of forty. It was literally a social crime to be 'old' unless one was in a position of wealth and power.

"The few attaining such status were resented by the young people beneath them—indeed, the whole competitive economy worked to increase the friction between youth and age. The elderly poor were resented as an economic burden; the elderly rich were an economic menace. In either case, old age was hated.

"After the War, and the Declaration of Dependence, the same condition prevailed in the new social order. A few powerful oldsters remained safe and secure on top, and the many indigents were doomed to exile and murder. The present disposition of the Socially Secured is merely a logical extension of the attitudes and modes of earlier times—when old people were sentenced to drag out their declining years on state

charity or the grudging bounty of their offspring."

Graham sighed. "I know it's true," he said. "But you'd think the Psychos would recognize it. Haven't they tried to eliminate killing and hatred?"

"You know better than that," Doc answered. "All they've really done is channelize aggressions which might otherwise be directed against their own authority. That's why we have the Sadies—what are they but psychodrama units where people are permitted to torture and destroy dummies and vent their pent-up aggressions as catharsis? That's the reason for the Playdiums. Look at your own field—the emotion-picture, and 4D auto-erotic sexaphones! Remember the manicycle duels; merely a natural sequential development of the old automotive days when motorists drove in savage and suppressed hatred of their fellows on the open roads. And what of the sexual outlets—the Fornivacations and the Libidose?"

"Of course, even these developments haven't really solved the situation. The Psychos still had to create the Womb and the Insanatorium to take care of non-conformists and avoid the danger of questioning or open revolt. They think they're secure now, because they've drained off all the rebel elements in the population, but they're wrong. Top ranks are really weak—it's a case of too many Chiefs and not enough introverts. And that's

where our opportunity lies. All their control is centered in the channels of communication. If we can commandeer those channels—"

"Then what? You expect to deluge the Domes with counter-propaganda?"

"No," Doc murmured. "We're done with deception. All that's needed is tell the truth. We'll wait until the next flight comes over; it's due in just a couple of days now. This time we'll do more than send out the boats for rescue. The vessels will be equipped for recording. We'll be taking Realies of everything that happens—we'll show the actual fate of the Socially Secured. What do you suppose will happen when we beam those Realies out from Hollywood to every screen in the country?"

"But how will you get to Hollywood, how will you gain access to the beaming centers?"

"That part is easy," Doc assured him. "Wait and see." He grinned. "A week from today, if all goes well, we'll be in Hollywood and we'll control the media."

"Just like that, eh?" Graham sighed. "And supposing I believe it's possible, supposing it actually happens—then what? Do you really imagine that just by exposing the murder of the Socially Secured you're going to win over a psychologically-conditioned population? It's too simple to be sound."

"Of course. But I told you we had another weapon. Youth—"

He paused and turned as Clare entered.

"The reports just came," she said. "The Jets are taking off now. They're due over us in three hours!"

"Now? But I was told the flight was scheduled for the end of the week."

"I know. Something must have happened to step up the program."

"Three hours!" Doc shook his head. "We have no time for adequate preparation. I'll have to call a general assembly at once."

"I've already put the message through. We'll meet below in ten minutes." Clare nodded.

"And your detail?"

"The crews will be on the boats, and the equipment mounted and in place."

"Good." Doc rose and beckoned to Graham. "You'll come with me," he said.

And so it was, in the meeting area beneath the Insanatorium, that Graham learned the first steps in what was to come. The entire personnel had assembled, and when he glanced at the earnest faces surrounding him he was conscious of suppressed excitement but no surprise, no consternation. This was expected; this was what everyone had been waiting for.

Doc's briefing was a mere verbal shorthand; they already knew what to do, for everything had been planned and rehearsed.

The boats were going out manned by full technical crews,

to record the dumping of the Socially Secured. Every detail had been carefully anticipated, each man had been assigned his set task.

But that was only the first part of the program. After the recordings were made, when the jets prepared to wheel back for their return flight—

"No!" Graham gasped, from his place in the assemblage at Clare's side. "It'll never work! It isn't possible!"

"It must!" Clare whispered, furiously. "Don't you see that it's our one opportunity? That's why you and Considine went through all this. And he's not the only one. Each man selected has been individually briefed and trained. Within a few hours now, we'll be in command."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Graham murmured.

"All right, you *can* see it," the girl replied. "Come along with me on my boat, if you like."

And he did.

The warning signal sounded, and the meeting dispersed in confusion; an efficient, highly-organized confusion. For Clare hadn't lied — each man and woman had a place and a purpose. Fully a hundred of them manned the dozen tiny vessels that edged out from their mooring-places and into the dark waters of the Gulf. Their movements directed and coordinated by signals from a scanner-system mounted in the lead-ship, they crept away from the shore and fanned out in a broad and sweep-

ing semi-circle some miles distant from the cluster of Keys.

The night was dark and moonless, and a chill breeze played across the foam-crested waves. Standing at Clare's side against the rail, Graham stared out at the roiling water. Sky and sea inundated him in immensity.

For the first time in years—perhaps for the first time in his entire life—he caught a glimpse of true perspective. Once there had been the glory that was Greece, and its galleys had roamed afar, only to vanish beneath the waves. The triremes of mighty Rome had foundered in darkling waters, and in the north the dragon-ships went down to doom. The might of nations—the fleets of France, the armadas of Spain, the galleons of Portugal and the lordly lines of the British man-of-war had vanished in their turn, and so had the proud battleships and the sleek atomic subs of a latter day. For they were only toys and their masters were but children, playing at war and government. They came and vanished, but the waves endured, and the eternal sea claimed them all. Kingdoms and nations drowned, were swallowed up in the sea of history where their passing caused scarcely a ripple.

Graham thought of all the fine words, the fanciful phrases, the facilely-formulated philosophy he had heard in recent weeks. He knew now that it was without meaning or significance. What was meaningful was the devour-

ing sea, what was significant was the engulfing night around him. And as on the sea, so on the land. All through the ages, all over the surface of the earth, men fought their battles—for king and country, for government and religion—a thousand concepts of right and wrong and truth and justice and freedom. It mattered not to the earth who won or who lost, for in the end earth claimed them all. Victor and victim alike went down into dust in the end, and of their boasts and battle-cries, of their creeds and concepts, not an echo remained. And here on the sea, the waters whirled and waited to welcome them in the eternal embrace of oblivion.

There are times when such thoughts come to all men, and when they do there is only one source of surcease; to cling to the flesh as the sole symbol of salvation. And so it was that Graham turned to Clare, and she pressed against him, and in her response was the illusion of the reality he craved. *This is real*, he told himself. *Forget the philosophies and the psychology, forget all the ologies and isms. Measure life in its moments.*

As he held her, savoring her surrender, the odd and alien thought obtruded. He remembered Sigmund's filmanalysis, and his subsequent experiences; he remembered Considine and the hypnotape and the long conversational sessions. Had it all been a form of autoanalysis, in a way? Had he actually learned something about himself, learned to

establish a viewpoint and an identity distinct from that imposed by pressure and pattern? In the Domes, men didn't consider themselves the pawns of Nature; when they embraced women it was merely to seek sensation for its own sake. Perhaps it *was* important that all men be given, once again, an opportunity like this—to stand under a sullen sky and consider their own unimportance, to cleave unto the flesh of their own kind in a search for strength as well as for fleeting fulfilment.

If so, then what lay ahead was worth fighting for. Freud and Jung and Reik and Adler would never approve of such immature antism. But they and their followers were not gods—they were men. And the men who came after them had twisted their teachings and distorted their theories into a dogma of deceit. Conditioned civilization was a farce. It was better to be a berserker Viking facing death on a dark sea than an unthinking drone in a Dome whose ironic destiny would be death in the same dark sea—but not death by choice, merely death by decree.

And Clare, like all women in all times, in the arms of all men, opened her eyes and whispered, "What are you thinking about?"

"The future," Graham answered.

"The future?"

"Yes. For the first time, I'm beginning to feel that there *is* a future."

She opened her mouth to reply,

but the answer came from overhead. In throbbing sussuration, the jets droned.

Clare sprang to her feet and hurried below. "The lights!" she cried. The crew members were already at work, and the beams swept across the waters. And now, as the droning from the skies deepened into thunder, the lights flashed forth from every vessel, flaming against the flaring facets of the waves.

Graham stood at the rail and Clare rejoined him there. Now it was merely a matter of waiting.

There was no recording installation or equipment on this little vessel, but Graham knew what must be taking place on some of the other craft. Techno teams were tracking the jets on their course, filming the flight in full sensory range. Lenses and prisms pierced the night, capturing each impression overhead. Now the jets were poised, now the hatches were opening above, and the bodies came hurtling down into doom and darkness.

This was the way; the way to oblivion. But there would be no oblivion, for the recordings registered each instant and incident.

Now some of the boats edged out of the perimeter and into the circle of luminance. Brass in the jets above would not be alarmed; it was the duty of these ships to search the waters for possible survivors. They could not know that the camera crews were filming a documentary of death.

At a command from Clare, their vessel turned and bobbed away from the circle. It was followed by a dozen others.

"But aren't you going to look for survivors?" Graham asked.

She shook her head. "No time. Let the others do it. We'll need every man when the jets come in. Doc must be signalling them now."

"You mean, he wants them to land?"

"Of course. You heard the plan. They're to pick up the returnees from the Insanatorium and take them back as cured, for reassignment to duty. And when they hear that you're one of them—"

"Me?"

"Considine, of course. He goes back in your place, remember? And there'll be others. Enough to insure that the films and tracks are smuggled aboard the jets. Enough to infiltrate the Domes, make contact with our people who are already planted there, waiting to act. Next time we'll send more, and the time after that, still more. Six months from now, maybe less, everything will be ready. We can strike, then. But this is the first step—to get some of our people back, to get Considine into Hollywood. He knows who to contact when he gets there—"

Graham attempted to reply, but the vibration overhead was deafening. The jets had been signalled; they were wheeling in for a landing on the Key.

The vessel headed for its harbor.

As they disembarked, Graham started up the path along the side of the mooring-area, but Clare put her hand on his arm.

"Wait here," she said. "You mustn't be seen. Remember, they are coming to escort ex-patients back to their Domes. Some will go to Nework, some to Sanloo—but Considine goes straight to Hollywood. Until he's left, you've got to keep out of sight."

"But don't I even get a chance to say good-bye?" Graham hesitated. "I feel it's important. We've been so close to one another. In a way, it's like losing a part of myself—"

"I know. But it is more important that the plans go through. Now, wait here. I'll come back for you after it's safe."

Clare slipped away and Graham stood alone in the night. He edged into the shadow of the dockside sheds and lit a sig, trying to compose himself. Too much was happening, too quickly. The jets had come, and the plan was operating; he'd found Clare, and now he was going to lose Considine. He'd told the truth about his feelings; it was as though he were losing a part of himself, and a very vital part. Considine was his double, his—what was the word in the fantasy books?—his *doppelganger*. He had shared so much of his inner being with the other man that a psychic duality of identification had been established. And there was more to it than

that; a stronger feeling, a latent content of emotion. More and more, in their weeks together, he had come to realize how closely Considine shared not only his knowledge but his thought-processes. So very frequently he'd found the other man literally anticipating his own words, his own reactions. Now, for some vague reason, he felt impelled to share his latest responses. He wanted to tell Considine about Clare, wanted to talk to him about the events to come. With a shock, he realized that he'd never gotten around to discussing Considine's past life, or *his* personal problems. And they had never discussed the problem of invading the Domes. There was danger for Considine in days to come, and yet the self-effacing man had never mentioned it. That was the thing which disturbed Graham the most, he realized; Considine had been so completely *self-effacing*. He had applied himself wholly to the problem of eliminating his own personality and adopting that of Graham. Why was he so dedicated? How could any man make such a sacrifice?

In his preoccupied introversion, Graham had never really given the matter a thought. Now he realized that he had undergone a unique experience with a remarkable man. He wanted to see him again, wanted to tell him so. And there was something else, something even more important, buried just below the threshold of consciousness. Another reason for saying good-bye—

But Clare was right. He must keep out of sight. Most particularly now, because the jets had landed, and the men were coming. Just a few of them, of course; not the entire crews of the six in the fleet—gazing up at the floodlighted area before the Insanatorium buildings he could see a group of about a dozen khaki-clad Brass moving along the walks. Something about the outthrust head of the man in the lead triggered a reaction of recognition.

Krug was with them!

Yes, now he could see the profile under the lights. Krug was here, to escort Considine to Hollywood. And if he recognized the deception—

But he wouldn't. Considine had been briefed. He'd play his role perfectly. There was no danger. Or was there?

Graham grimaced. No danger? There were a thousand dangers. How could one man, or any group of men, get away with a stunt like this? How could he face Krug, and Sigmond, and Warner, and Zank—people who knew Graham well, who were on the alert to observe the slightest defection from their rigid concept of the norm?

He found himself pacing along the walk after the group had disappeared into the building. He couldn't help it; he couldn't stand still. Oh, he'd kept out of sight. But he had to see, had to know what was happening inside. Doc's office—that's where they all must

be. If there was no one in the outer corridors, perhaps he could slip into the adjoining room. Then he could at least hear what was going on. There was no harm in that; there'd be no danger involved.

Nor was there. The corridor was deserted, and he slipped past the closed door unnoticed, his muffled footsteps muted by the sound of voices from within. He gained access to the next room and switched on the light. Tip-toeing over to the connecting door, he stooped to listen.

They were all inside; he could hear them. Must be quite a crowd—a dozen Brass from the jets, plus an equal number of Doc's people. And he could hear Doc, and Krug, and Considine. Or was it himself? Again, a wave of sensation he could not identify swept over him as he heard Considine speaking, speaking levelly and easily, in *his* voice. The man was a master-mimic.

"—quite fit again," Considine was saying. "I'm sorry to have caused all this disturbance."

"—no need to feel that way." Graham recognized Krug's deeper tones. "Sigmond is most anxious to see you before deciding on a new assignment. Perhaps a change—"

"—learned a number of things. As a Talent—"

Graham pressed his ear against the door. Considine was speaking so softly, so casually, that it was hard to catch more than an occasional phrase. He

closed his eyes, concentrating in an effort to hear the rest.

And that, of course, was his mistake. He realized it the moment the hand grasped his shoulder. He hadn't heard the outer door open, hadn't heard the big man cross the room towards him. Now he opened his eyes and stared upwards at the smiling stranger.

He knew that smile, knew that face. Long ago, on a roof in Hollywood, with Wanda, he'd been introduced to the big man. He was one of Sigmond's Medics.

"West!" he said.

"That's right, Graham. How nice of you to remember."

"But—"

"Sigmond sent me down to escort you on your return trip. I imagined Krug had already located you. He's next door now, isn't he?"

"Yes—that is—"

"Shall we join him, then? I know he's impatient to see you."

Graham nodded, stepping back. If he could jump this man, now, quickly—

West gestured politely with his left hand. And then Graham saw that his right hand held a stunner.

"We might as well use this entrance," West said, still smiling. "After you, Graham."

Graham found the activator-button on the side of the door. His thumb went forward to press it. Then he whirled, and brought up his hand. The thumb dug itself between West's eyes. His other hand went for the wind-

pipe. West reeled back, bringing up the stunner to sweep in a blind arc. Graham's knee lashed out and caught West on the wrist. The stunner clattered to the floor as West fell back against a desk. Then Graham was on top of him, both thumbs gouging into the big man's neck. West threshed and threw him off. Graham stepped back to scoop up the stunner. And then—

The door to the next room opened, and he heard Krug's voice from behind him.

"What's going on here?"

He had the stunner now, but his face was in the light.

"Graham!" Krug was shouting. "What kind of bombed nonsense is this? Two of you—"

Graham turned, raising his weapon. And then something exploded between his fingers. Krug wasn't using a stunner. He had an old-fashioned gun.

"Look out!"

It was Doc's voice, and barely discernible in the sudden roar of voices. Graham went back against the wall as somebody shoved Krug from behind. The second shot went wild, but then the gun levelled again. This time he wouldn't miss. The others stood in the doorway, watching.

"Krug, wait—" Doc was shouting now, but Krug shook his head. He wasn't waiting. Graham saw the pudgy finger tense against the trigger. And then, emerging from the huddled mass in the doorway, the moving figure of a man. It was Considine.

He flung himself on Krug, grabbing the hand that held the gun, jerking it to one side. Krug turned, and as he did so, Graham bent forward and picked up the stunner again. He levelled it at the thick neck and squeezed with all his strength.

Just as he did so, the gun went off for the last time. Krug jerked and buckled in sudden paralysis—but it was Considine who fell first, with a gaping hole where his heart had been.

Then, for a moment, all dissolved into madness. Graham could hear Doc shouting once more, shouting orders. He was vaguely conscious that all of Doc's people were armed with stunners, partially aware that Krug's companions had come here unsuspecting and weaponless. The Brass were falling now, there wasn't even a struggle; the stunners struck them down like idiotic tenpins. Their bodies slumped along the floor in this office and the one beyond. When it was over, Doc's group stood above them, poised and ready for command.

But no command came. For Doc was staring at Considine, just as Graham stared. There were sudden, unbidden tears in the eyes of both men.

"He saved my life," Graham whispered.

"I know," Doc nodded. "But that doesn't help us now. He's dead. Lewis is dead."

"Lewis?"

"You never realized, did you?" Doc sighed and turned away.

"Yes, it's true. He was your father."

CHAPTER 12

IT FELL into place, then; everything made sense. The curious look Clare had given him at their first meeting—the way Doc had singled him out for special treatment — Considine's odd gentleness and still odder reticence concerning himself—the way in which Considine had so frequently seemed to know what he was thinking, to know what he knew.

Yes, everything made sense, now, including the uncanny natural resemblance which had been heightened by make-up. And yet *nothing* made sense. Because Graham's father, Lewis, was still a man of fifty-five and Graham was thirty years younger. Cosmetology alone couldn't account for his youthfulness.

"Youth." It was Doc who explained. "I told you it was our secret weapon. And in one of the laboratories—"

In one of the laboratories, certain renegade Medics had been working with regenerative hormones. Basically, it was a matter of estrogen-cycle control through an injection process. "No, it's not eternal youth," Doc said. "But we have learned a simple, universally-applicable method of retarding the aging process. Of course, in this experimental phase, it's impossible to predict the duration of the effect, but I'm assured that a regular annual

or semi-annual injection will not only slow down senile degeneration but bring physical tonus back to the thirty-year level for an indefinite period. There seems to be no reason why the so-called prime of life can't be extended until men are well into their seventies or eighties. The manufacture of synthetic hormone-derivatives is inexpensive; the effects thus far leave no cause for doubt. We've learned how to eliminate the physical symptoms of what we call old age."

"So that's your weapon," Graham mused. "When you took over communication-media in the Domes, you'd do more than just expose what happened to the Socially Secured. You'd reveal the news of this discovery just as you've been telling me. You'd be able to promise everyone a prolongation of youth, of active life."

"Don't you see how they'd respond?" Clare asked him. "Once the facts came out, the Psychos couldn't withstand the pressure. And they'd open the Domes. Oh, Doc planned it all so carefully, and when you arrived it was the final touch. We'd already rescued Lewis, but never dreamed of an opportunity like this—to find his son, and plan a perfect masquerade. That gave us the ideal combination; the weapon, and the man to wield it. We had everything."

"Had!" Doc shook his head. "But he's dead now."

"I'm alive."

They stared at Graham, then,

but he didn't wait for them to speak.

"Why not? There was no need to send my father, there never was any need. If only you'd told me first—"

"But you couldn't take his place!"

"Of course, I can."

"Our plans—" Doc sighed. "It took months to formulate this operation, months of planning, of dealing with every possible contingency which might arise. He was to go back, resume his work, make contact with others of our group all over the Dome system, arrange slowly for concerted action. We wouldn't strike for at least another year yet, we couldn't hope to. And now—"

"And now your plans must be changed," Graham murmured. "Because my father is dead, and you have less than an hour. You must let me go."

"An hour?" Clare glanced at him, then straightened. "That's right!" She put her hand on Doc's wrist. "Krug, and West, and the others here—in an hour they'll recover consciousness. What happens then?"

"We'll dump them in the Gulf," Doc told her.

"Yes. But what about the crews on the jets?" Graham asked. "They'll be expecting Krug and his men to return, and bring a party of ex-inmates with them. How long before they come down to investigate? How long before somebody sends in a report to Control down in the Miami Consumarket or back in Hollywood?

I'd say we have just about an hour in which to do it."

"Do what?" Doc muttered. Graham told him.

It took ten minutes—ten precious minutes. But then the matter was settled, and things moved swiftly. The boats moved swiftly out into the Gulf, and the bodies of Krug and the other Brass whirled whitely in the waves and then disappeared forever. Whirled whitely, because they had been stripped naked. Others were wearing their Khaki uniforms as they marched back to the landing area and boarded the jets. With them went a hundred Insanatorium inmates—ostensibly, they were being escorted to board for the return trip to various Domes. Actually, they and their khaki-clad escorts alike carried stunners. Stunners to beam the sentries on duty before the ships! Stunners to silence the men who received them on board, as the party split up into six units working with swift efficiency. There were minor slipups and several skirmishes, but no major disasters. The ultimate objective was to work their way through the jets compartment by compartment, until reaching the pilot cabins—and the imperative need was to overcome pilot and communications crews before any alarm could be sent.

"We did it!" Clare exulted. "We've got the jets."

"And their crews?" Doc raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"The boats are going out

again, all of them," Clare said, her voice dropping. "It's the only way."

"Now for the next step," Graham said. "You say that you have men here with experience at piloting and handling the com-units. That means we'll have no trouble making the flight. And there'll be enough uniforms taken from the crews to go around. That means we'll be able to get into the Dome at Hollywood. And after that—"

"Yes, after that, then what?" Doc frowned. "It's a crazy gamble, but I'm willing to concede we might make it that far. If we keep sending signals in to the effect that everything is all right, they may not suspect until we arrive. But where do we go from there?"

"Straight to His MGMinence," Graham answered. "They won't expect trouble when we land, so they won't be prepared to offer any resistance. We can break through without fighting. What happens then depends on just how much we can do during a three-hour flight. You've already told me you have people inside the Domes in key positions—I assume you mean men indoctrinated down here who have returned to various Techno jobs in media channels."

"That's correct."

"Well, they'll have to be contacted at once, as many as possible, while we're in flight. Meanwhile, there's the matter of processing those Realies."

"Masters will be done in an-

other two hours," Clare informed him. "They're working in the labs downstairs. At least we'll have olfac, video and audio."

"That's enough. If we can put through a Universal Attention Beam from Hollywood, we can preempt all networks. First the films and then Doc's speech."

"But by that time the Brass will be alerted," Doc told him. "Even if we get that far, even if we live long enough to beam our message, it won't help. Brass controls all weapons—do you expect the mobs to fight them with their bare hands? Besides, they aren't *conditioned* to fight. The bombed fools do what they're told, and all their lives they have learned to obey Brass and Psycho orders. You can't turn the Domes into revolutionary centers with an emotion-picture and a few words. Even if they believe it, they won't be able to fight."

"I know," Graham said. "But I wasn't counting on a fight. If His MGMinence issues orders to surrender—"

Doc exploded. "Bomb it, this isn't a pornographic fantasy! You can't hope to play the superman hero, walk into the Home Dome and force the evil mastermind to call for surrender on pain of death. I happen to know Archer. His MGMinence isn't a coward—he'll die rather than give in. Sigmond's loyal, and so is Hix. The most you can hope to gain from all this is panic and civil war for a few hours.

Then the Brass will cut down any rebels—not that it will matter to us. Because by then we'll be finished, too."

"There's a chance," Graham said.

Doc opened his mouth to reply, but it was Clare who interrupted him. "Yes, there's a chance," she echoed. "And we'd better take advantage of it." The girl rose and faced the older man. "We *must* take advantage of it because it *is* a chance and we no longer have a choice. The jets are already captured. The crews are dead, you can't bring them back again. What's your alternative to doing as Graham suggests? Do you intend to sit here until they get suspicious back in Hollywood and send down another flight of Brass police ships?"

"But we can't possibly win this way. His MGMinence won't surrender, the mobs won't be able to resist the Brass. I don't understand why Graham persists in blinding himself to the obvious facts. How can he say there's a chance, under the circumstances?" Doc sighed. "I'm not cracking. It's just that I can't see any sense to dying needlessly for a lost cause."

"Can anyone?" Graham asked. "What's that?"

"Can anyone see any sense to dying needlessly? Oh, I'm not talking about men like His MGMinence, or Sigmond—men who feel dedicated by virtue of their power and position. I'm talking about the rank and file

of the Brass, the Technos, the Medics, the Eggheads. Suppose it isn't a matter of their fighting a few rebels roused by our message. Suppose it's a matter of surrender or die?"

"But how could it be?"

"You say you have people planted through previous infiltration, in various Domes. How many?"

"A thousand, perhaps."

"Is that all?"

"They have friends, families. Some of them have made cautious attempts to proselyte. There are allies."

"How many that we can count upon in a situation like this?"

"Four, perhaps five thousand, at most."

"In all the Domes?"

"No. They're concentrated in the major areas, like Nework, Denver, Sanfran."

"That should serve our purpose. If the big centers go, the little ones will have to follow suit. They depend on the others for supplies and material as well as orders."

"I still don't see—"

"Are most of your people Technos?"

"The majority, yes. But not top-ranking. Minor officials, in some cases, and crew workers."

"Free to move about?"

"More or less."

"And you have people planted in com-centers at media, to take messages? And they can relay orders to these Technos?"

"Yes. The point is, there's no organization, no instructions.

We've never issued a plan. I presume we could get a certain number of messages through safely to various Domes and our people there could relay to the Technos. But, if we are able to arrange it, what are you going to tell them? How can a handful operate effectively against Brass?"

"I'll tell you when we're in flight," Graham answered. "No time now. We've got a date with His MGMinence at Twenty-First-Century-Vox."

CHAPTER 13

A MAN named Hoskins was speaking to Sigmond over the com-system. "Krug reporting," he said, in a surprisingly successful simulation of Krug's deep voice. "Yes . . . all checked and cleared . . . eighty-two rehabilitees returned to seventeen Domes . . . I'm turning in the reports for processing . . . no . . . oh, by the way, I have your Talent with me . . . yes, Graham . . . thought you might want to check him personally before reassignment . . . what? . . . good . . . I'll bring him down . . ."

The circuit broke and Hoskins turned to Graham.

"I'm supposed to bring you in right away," he said. "As soon as we land."

"We can spare you and another man as escorts," Doc told him. "No more. We'll need everyone available just to take over Jetport. And if word gets through

to Sigmond and the others before you arrive—"

He didn't complete his sentence. There was no need to say anything more.

Even as he had outlined the sketchy plan of attack and operations, Graham had realized the hopelessness of the task set for them.

Landing was no problem. The familiar ships would be admitted to the Domes without question; it was improbable that anyone in the signal-towers would question the identity of the pilots and navigators whose voices were transmitted in flat, mechanical tones.

But once on the ground at the port, everything depended on luck.

Their people had already donned the uniforms of the dead crew-members; the service blue of the Technobility, the khaki uniforms of the Brass. Almost all of them were armed with stunners and a few had the old-fashioned guns as well. But it would be best not to use them. The trick would be to get clear of the field itself and converge on the Control Area.

It would be nothing short of miraculous if they could capture the Port before someone noticed and put through an alert. But it must be done. From Control they could signal to the Media installations—and pray that their people were ready to act there. Then the selected party must convey the films by jet-cop and get them beamed. By that

time, probably, Media units would be besieged, for the alarm would be out.

"And that's why it's up to the other group," Graham had told them. "You know where to go and what to do. Fortunately, your objective is right at the edge of the Jetport area. But there's no question of gaining entry by deception here. You'll have to fight your way. You know the rest."

He paused. "As for myself, I'll get to Sigmond and His MGMinence. Maybe they'll finish me off—but I think they'll listen, first. And if they listen, and the 'casts are beamed, we have a chance. *If* the rest of you succeed by then."

Doc nodded. "We'll manage," he said. "We have no choice."

Clare turned to Graham, opened her mouth, then closed it. He squeezed her arm gratefully.

"Thanks," he said. "You spared me the 'take me with you' line. You and the other women will stay here, on the ship. We'll keep the crew aboard here, too. If anything goes wrong, they have orders to take off immediately. Who knows? Some day you may be back."

"With nine women and a crew?" Clare tried to smile.

"We'll do our best to prevent the necessity," Graham answered.

And that was as close to heroics as he ever got.

It was odd, he mused, as the great ship quivered and settled, sinking down slowly and accurately through the opening in the plexide Dome. This was the time for heroism, for all the adjectives-and-adrenalin which accompanied deeds of daring—or was it derring-do?—in the old pornography. But he wasn't sure of the adjectives, and he certainly wasn't aided by any excessive adrenal discharge. All he felt was nervous tension and, beneath it, a sick fear.

Graham had a suspicion that almost all of them felt like this, now. Even Doc, who was quietly motioning towards the opening cabin-compartments, telling Hoskins and his companion, "You get out first, with Graham. Whatever happens, I want you to be on your way. Nobody will question Brass if you requisition a 'copter. We'll wait until you've left."

Doc smiled, but he was nervous, and his outstretched hand was wet.

And Clare's lips, trembling beneath his—which were also trembling.

Heroism, Graham thought. Where are all the noble sentiments now? I don't really want to do this. I want to run. Most of all, I have to go to the bathroom.

It was ridiculous, grotesque; yet, somehow, it reaffirmed reality. From now on all of them would act in fear and trembling, but that didn't matter. The important thing was that

they did act. One step at a time, now . . .

And one step at a time, Graham was walking across the huge field. Hoskins and the other man, Rich, flanked him on either side. Brass, on official business, escorting a civilian. Nobody glanced at them. Ground-crews were slowly converging on the constellation of six jets. Graham prayed that they'd take their time. For when they finally reached those jets, entered them, there would be no turning back. Not for them, ever—and not for Graham's people.

"Over here." Hoskins had found his 'copter and his crew. Now he had stepped forward, flashing the idento of the dead Krug. He was speaking casually to a pilot. The pilot nodded. Good. They'd managed, *this* far.

Rich helped him into his seat. They were taking off, leaving the port. Out of the corner of his eye, Graham noted that some of the ground crewmen were moving up the landing-ramps into the jets.

There were stunners waiting for them, even though the hands which directed them probably trembled in nervous apprehension. Just as Graham was trembling, now.

He forced himself to look ahead, at the hills of Hollywood. Herc was the Intelligentsium's silver spire and the familiar T-square of Technoquarters, and there—near the historic site of the first Psycho Headquarters, Forest Laundry—was Microcity.

That's the spot where they'd be 'casting the films. *If* they managed to get there. Staring at the monumental magnificence of the structures below, Graham felt an added access of anxiety. How could a few ever prevail against so many? The Psycho fortresses seemed impregnable.

The 'copter was descending now, descending upon the flat landing-platform of the new Psychocenter. It settled. The doors opened.

"Wait here," Hoskins snapped to the pilot. "We'll be back in a moment with another passenger."

I doubt that, Graham told himself. But this was no time for doubts. He had all he could do to walk without faltering. Hoskins slipped him a stunner.

Then the white-robed man emerged from the exit-vator. Graham remembered another white-robed man on this same roof; a man named West. He used the stunner almost automatically, and the man fell mechanically. The whole episode seemed unreal, and that removed the fear. Graham was just watching a Realie now, or a filmanalysis in which he was both actor and spectator.

That made it easier. Made it easier to descend with Hoskins and Rich, seek out Sigmond's office, wait until his sec nodded for them to enter.

Sigmond was in a posture chair behind his desk, the light reflecting from his high fore-

head. His pale face was almost as white as his priestly Psycho robe. He glanced at Graham incuriously, but there was questioning in the gaze he directed at Hoskins and Rich.

"Where is Krug?" he asked.

Rich stepped closer to the desk and smiled. "Where you'll be," he murmured, "if you don't come quietly."

Sigmond's eyes focussed on the gun which had suddenly appeared in Rich's hand, and there was no longer a question in his glance.

"Get up," Rich said. "Just keep your hands where I can see them."

Sigmond rose heavily. The light caught the jewelled rims of his pince-nez.

"Your doing," he muttered, staring at Graham. "I might have known. Paranoid. Go ahead and shoot."

"Never mind the labels." Graham was exteriorized; he heard himself talking, but there was no feeling of conscious volition. "If you think we're here to kill you, then you're the one with delusions of persecution. We're taking you to see Archer."

"His MGMinence? But he's in Council, there's a high-level meeting—"

"So much the better. All we want is the pleasure of your company, to insure us getting in to see him."

"But what's this all about?"

"You'll hear the story when we get there. Now, march." Gra-

ham nodded, and Rich stepped behind Sigmond, pressing the gun into the bulk of his back.

"Put it away, now," Graham told Rich. "But keep him covered." He turned to Sigmond. "Just wanted you to know it's there. And it'll be there, all the way. You're going to walk out of this office, tell your sec you have an appointment with Archer, and take a 'copter with us. That's all. One slip on your part—" He hesitated. "Oh, yes, you might remember to smile. If it helps, don't think of it as a gun pointing at your back. Call it a phallic symbol."

They went out of the office, went back up to the roof, climbed back into the 'copter, and took off.

"Take us to Twentieth-Century-Vox," Hoskins said.

And they made it, just like that.

Graham wondered if the others had made it.

Had they managed to take care of the ground crews at the Jetport? Had they managed to get into the Controls and take over communications without alarms being sent out? Had the second group been able to reach Microcity, invade its precincts, beam the films?

And most important of all, had the third group attained its objective? That was the vital question.

Heroes. There were no heroes in a situation like this. There were only men with sweating palms, full bladders, queasy

stomachs. And there were no great objectives; it was all a matter of living from moment to moment—of taking one step at a time without being observed, of using a stunner quickly, before one was used on you, of trying to anticipate what to do next and trying to remember what *had* to be done next. Only in the aggregate was the task impressive; infiltrating the communications media and beaming the film to every screen, sounding a preempt alert so that all would listen and all would see, holding off any opposition until the film was run and the message delivered. Each man was part of a hastily-organized team and each man's job was small. But the result could be incalculable.

If it worked—

Graham stopped thinking about the big picture. He was back in the little picture, or at least back *watching* it. The little picture, in which he was entering the halls of Twenty-First-Century-Vox, watching Sigmond at the outer officentry as he smiled and requested immediate audience with His MGMinence.

And now they were being buzzed into the Conference Suite; Sigmond in the lead, Rich and Hoskins right behind him, Graham himself in the rear.

It wasn't a picture any longer.

This was real.

In a moment he'd be face to face with Archer, His MGMinence—

And then he was.

Face to face with saturnine, graying Archer; with Technochief Schwartz, with Medic Ormsbee, with Hix from Brass and with little Dean from the Egghead Division. Everyone of them a hateful symbol.

They were all in a line, confronting him quite silently. This was the moment he'd waited for, the moment to speak.

But Archer spoke first.

"We've been expecting you," said His MGMinence, softly. "You see, we've just watched your little film."

Graham found himself trembling now, but not with fear. There was only exultation. *They'd made it, then—they'd made it, and the film had been cast. Now he had only to tell them the rest, deliver his ultimatum—why, it was all as simple as those Space Operas he'd turned out. Bem meets Fem.*

Or was it?

Suddenly he heard the warning wail without, the shrilling of the sirens. That meant general alert. Instinctively, he reached into his jacket for the stunner. He felt reassured as he grasped the handle.

Archer was watching him, but he didn't move. He merely blinked his eyes, once.

And from somewhere behind him, the other stunners flashed. He saw Rich stumble, saw Hoskins fall, and then he was going down into a whirlpool where the sirens shrieked up into screaming silence.

CHAPTER 14

HIS MGMinence nodded at the Brass in the doorway. "Out," he said.

"Aren't you going to finish them off?" Hix asked.

"There'll be plenty of time for that, later," Archer answered. "We'll want to question them first, of course."

"Of course," Hix agreed, hastily. "Right now—"

"Right now your job is to get on top of this. You heard the reports. Apparently there are three areas affected—Jetport, Microcity and—"

"What about the mobs?" It was Schwartz who interrupted. His MGMinence frowned. He wasn't used to interruptions. Still, this was an emergency. No point in making an issue of it if Schwartz lost his head. The important thing was to keep his own.

"Brass will deal with any trouble that may arise," he said. "Personally, I don't anticipate anything except sporadic outbreaks."

"But everyone saw it—the Socially Secured—those bombed bodies dropping into the water—the traumatic effect—"

"Traumatic effect!" Archer's voice was scornful. "Leave that to Sigmond. It's his department." He stepped forward and confronted the Psycho Chief. "Are you all right?"

"Certainly. But what's happening?"

"Don't you know?" Medic

Ormsbee took up the thread of the conversation. Quickly, he told Sigmond about the film. Sigmond nodded.

"So they must have taken over Microcity to beam it, eh? I wonder how many of them are involved in this?"

"It doesn't matter," muttered little Dean. "The damage is done. That cast went out on preempt. Now everyone knows about the Socially Secured. Everyone knows about the new regenerative formula."

"Nonsense! There's no such formula!" Archer was emphatic, then tempered his tones. "But even if there is, it's not important. What's important is that we get back into Microcity and beam a few orders on preempt. Tell everyone that we've dealt with the trouble-makers. I'll make a personal appearance—"

"It's too late." Dean faced them. "You've already heard the orders, on the film-narration. There's been a call for revolt."

"Call for revolt!" Hix chuckled. "What do you think, that the mobs will take over with their bare hands? We have all the weapons."

"But these rebels may be armed."

"With what? A few handguns and stunners, perhaps? If so, I wish them luck—chances are, they're running like rats now, trying to get out of Microcity." Hix glanced at the dark and crackling wallscreen. "I notice nobody is casting any longer."

"Then what are we waiting

for?" Archer stepped forward once again. "No time for discussion now, gentlemen. You each know your duties. Let's roll it."

"Look!"

Sigmond was staring at the screen. The wall had brightened and now the crackling faded. Suddenly a face appeared before them.

"I know that man—" Sigmond began. And then his voice was drowned in the words from the wall.

"Attention, all Brass," Doc said. "Attention, all Brass. This is top warning. Repeat, top warning. We have taken over the oxygenerator units. Repeat, we have taken over the oxygenerator units."

"No," said Hix, softly.

"No further supply of oxygen will be released until we receive word of unconditional surrender. Civilian personnel are warned to get off the streets. Within fifteen minutes normal oxygen supply will be depleted below the safety levels. Repeat, top warning. All Brass to surrender immediately—"

"I told you it was too late," Dean muttered.

Hix slipped out of the room.

"Bomb it, we'll open the Dome," Archer said. "Plenty of air outside—"

"You had your chance," Dean answered. "Besides, you've forgotten. Your vents are at Jetport and the rebels hold it."

"Hix is sending Brass—"

"To suffocate out there?

They'll be running for shelter right now."

But Archer wasn't listening to Dean. He gazed over the top of his balding head as Hix re-entered hastily.

"It's true!" Hix said. "They did it. And the coms are jammed—reports from other Domes. Riot conditions in Miami, New York, Sanfran, Denver—oxygenerators going off in Sanloo, Pitts. Sabotage jobs. Can't contact GHQ. The men turned back from Microcity when this came over. I've got a cordon around the grounds here, but they won't hold. There's a mob outside—"

"They'll suffocate," Ormsbee said. "Give them two hours."

"Of course. But what about ourselves?"

"We'll stay right here," Archer decided. "No danger of suffocation inside for at least twenty-four hours."

"We haven't got twenty-four hours," Schwartz said. "Or even two. That mob's coming in, isn't it, Hix?"

"He's right," Hix answered. "Our only chance is to jet out immediately."

"Run for it?" His MGMinence scowled. "Why, you poor, bombed—"

"Shut up!" said Sigmond. "We'd better find a 'copter."

And with that simple sentence. His MGMinence was deposed. His thin, sagging figure was swept up in the flight along the outer corridor as the little wedge of Council-members, Hix

in the lead, battled their way to an exit-vator and the rooftop beyond.

Hix had taken the gun from Rich's jacket, and it was Dean who appropriated Graham's stunner. They left the unconscious men behind without a thought—unless a fleeting feeling of gratitude for their weapons. For the weapons alone prevailed in the panic which swept through the halls of Twenty-First-Century-Vox.

If there was anything more needed to indicate the end of an era, the spectacle of the surging throngs in these halls provided it. Brass, Technobility, Medics and Psychos struggled towards the roof. Frantic desperation took precedence over rank, and three times Hix had to use the gun before a path opened.

Finally they reached the roof. Sigmond found three 'copters there—all surrounded by knots of struggling men, intent upon escape.

Hix used the gun again, and again. He wasn't in time to save Schwartz or Ormsbee; both were pulled down in the melee. In the end only Dean, Sigmond, Hix and Archer took to the air, with Hix at the controls.

He tossed his empty, useless gun down into the screaming maw of the city below. Out of that maw the siren still wailed, but overriding it was the concerted roar of voices. The mob was abroad.

The mob was swarming into the Intelligentsium, circling

around Technoquarters. No Brass opposed its progress. Brass was hiding, Brass was running.

"Bombed idiots had better run, too!" Sigmond sighed. "The Dome is smogging up already. What will happen to them when the monoxide count goes up?"

"What happens to us?" Archer murmured. "Where can we go? We can't get out of the Dome."

"Let's be reasonable," Sigmond counseled. "This is no time to panic. What we need is a place of shelter. Not a private residence—the oxygen supply would be insufficient there. We want a large building, but a deserted one, for safety's sake. A place where we can have a breathing-spell, in every sense of the word. And that place is—"

"Down there!" Surprisingly enough, it was little Dean who spoke.

"Where?"

"To your left. That Sadie."

"A Sadie?"

"Why not? There's a landing-place on the roof."

"He's right. You won't find many people patronizing a Sadie at a time like this," Archer said. "Besides, they're all equipped with com-systems. We can put some messages through to Domes in other areas. Set us down."

So they were set down, on the roof of the Sadie.

As Archer had predicted, it was deserted. The attendant personnel had fled at the first warn-

ing. In the huge central arena a few dozen citizens, drugged with Libidose to a point where the warnings had been either unheard or unheeded, still enjoyed a healthful, therapeutic release from pent-up aggression. Some coupled in semi-seclusion in the small, padded cubicles lining the main hall, and others hacked and flailed at rows of dummies. A small cluster of teen-agers had mounted the gallows to hang a rubbery yet realistic blonde. Down at one end of the arena was the enclosed area of the torture-chambers. Realistic screams emanated from the speaker-system; apparently someone was playing with the racks or the strappado. There were no attendants present to peddle whips or knives, but the customers seemed to have helped themselves.

Ordinarily, Sigmond might have viewed the scene through the glass of the overhead office with a clinical and approving eye. Right now, he and the others were inspecting the command board.

"Yes, there's a two-way," he announced. "Hix, can you send?"

Brass nodded. "Yes, I can operate it." He seated himself, and Archer and Sigmond peered over his shoulder.

"You can beam into Microcity to announce surrender," Dean said.

"Surrender?" Hix jerked his head. "Who's talking about surrender? We'll beam out for help to other Domes. Get in a fleet of

jets. Let those fools asphyxiate the city if they like. Brass will come in with masks and oxygen tanks. We'll blow Microcity, blast the port."

"Exactly." Archer was regaining confidence now. "It may be a good thing. Teach them a lesson, once and for all."

"That's right," Sigmond assented. "Of course, you know this means we can't go back to a benevolent paternalism in the near future. We'll have to do a complete psychological about-face, institute complete controls. No more reassurances. The fear-syndrome—"

"I take it then that you're all in complete agreement, gentlemen," Dean murmured. "There is to be no thought of surrender?"

"Of course not," Archer snapped.

"Very well," said Dean.

And pulled out the stunner he had taken from Graham.

He waved it before their faces like a magic wand.

They froze and fell.

That part was easy.

The rest wasn't quite so easy.

Dean was a small man, and the task of dragging the bodies down into the arena, one by one, took most of his strength.

But he managed. He propped them up against the wall, near the cluster of dummy figures who stood in classic costumes of inferiority. Here was the plastic-faced priest, the ugly man in the old-fashioned gray flannel suit, the obvious political orator

with the word *Democrat* written across his slashed shirt-front and one empty eye-socket gaping as the result of a recent, enthusiastic attack.

Dean was glad to see that a knife-rack stood close by at the end of the wall. He moved the unconscious trio into place; they stood stiffly, limbs rigid in paralysis.

He wondered if they could still see and hear.

Dean could see and hear. And when he retreated once again to the glassed-in overhead office to put through his communication of surrender, he looked and listened.

Gazing down at the floor, Dean noticed a small cluster of patrons assembling. They examined the figures of Archer, Hix and Sigmond with curiosity, commenting amongst themselves.

"Look, Brass!"

"And a Psycho, too. Something new."

"Vo doop, Skidaloop." This comment from the drooling mouth of a woman who had exceeded her Libidosage. "Let's begin. Tear some skin. Come on guys let's get at him."

A big man came up with a handful of knives.

"I hate Brass," he said bitterly. "Big Brass!" He shoved the tip of his knife into the khaki tunic. "Cut his buttons off," he mumbled. "Cut—off—all—his—buttons — just — like — this. And — that's — not — all—"

The knife descended.

"Cri!" yelled a thin man,

shrilly. "Somethun' new. Like blood!"

"Ooooh!" This from the woman. "Lemme. Le'me!" She grabbed a knife, slashing at Sigmond. The Psycho's robe wasn't white any more.

Dean turned away, suddenly sickened but not before he saw the broad blade slice across the jugular of Archer.

Then he was speaking into the com.

"Yes," he said. "It's official. His MGMinence has unconditionally surrendered—"

CHAPTER 15

IT'S NEVER quite that simple," Doc said. "You understand that, don't you, Graham?

"Of course, we won. We found you and Rich and Hoskins in time, and you know what Dean reported concerning Archer and the rest. We're in control, and the oxygenators are functioning again, and on the face of it we could claim complete victory."

"The Domes are reporting in from all over," Clare added. "We've been feeding them Realies on what happened here."

"But we paid a price for it," Doc continued. "Thousands dead of suffocation in the streets. A third of Nework blasted. Casualties galore all over. And that's only the beginning. The real job is just ahead of us. First, a provisional government. And then, a complete reorientation process. Reeducation, reconditioning—it will take years. You can't expect

to take an ordinary citizen, used to beheading dummies in the Sadies and watching men kill one another in the Playdiums, and confer a nebulous 'freedom' on him.

"For that reason we can't disband the existing governmental fabric. We'll have to keep Psychos and Technos and Brass as organizational units, even if we use new personnel to implement new directives. Egghead supervision is even more important. Because in the end, it will all come down to an educational process.

"We're not prepared for a tenth of what we must confront and cope with. We need many months just to mount some kind of over-all plan."

Doc sighed and subsided. "I wish we'd had more time to prepare. This is just the first step."

"I've been thinking about that," Graham admitted. "A first step—and suppose it's in the wrong direction?"

"It could be. Men aren't perfect. Maybe the whole concept of freedom is a dream. But we have a right to dream, a right to try

to make those dreams come true in a free society.

"The old-fashioned family unit, the old-fashioned religious *ethos* act as custodians of those dreams. And the attendant striving, the struggle and the competition; these phenomena are in themselves part of the process of evolution. You can't deny the race the right to progress, however arrived at—it's a biological necessity for survival. Your so-called 'balance' is really stasis. There are going to be mistakes, yes, and misery, too, for many. But the future cannot be denied."

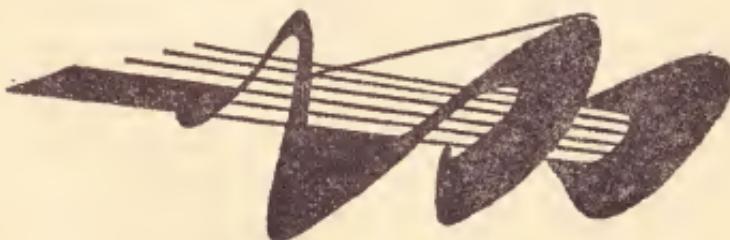
Clare looked at Graham and smiled.

And far overhead . . .

Far overhead, the swallow hovered. It swooped down, then instinctively deflected its flight, but only momentarily. An instant later it sped forward again, dropping downward. There was no longer anything to deflect its course.

Those tiny figures below were only men. And they were dismantling the Dome . . .

THE END



THE FLESH-MAN FROM FAR WIDE

By DAVID R. BUNCH

*Inside a Stronghold, happiness is
relatively easy to come by. Outside,
you never know where it is, or if
it is. But then it all depends on
your idea of Happiness.*

I HAD just nailed the mice down lightly by their tails to the struggle board, was considering how happy is happy, and was right on the point of rising from my hip-snuggie chair to go fetch forth the new-metal cat when my warner set up a din. I raced to my Viewer Wall where the weapon thumbs all were, set the peep scope to max-sweep and looked out, wide-ranging the blue plastic hills. And I saw this guy, this shape, this little bent-down thing coming not from the Valley of the White Witch, my main area of danger now, but coming from the Plains of Far Wide, from which I had not had a visitor for nigh on to five eras.

Was he sad, oh, was he sad! He came on, this little toad-down man, tap-tap, mince-mince, step-walk-step, but with tense carefulness in his slowness, as if

every inch-mince were some slipping up on a bird. It made me itch just to see him, and to think how walking should be, great striding, big reaching, tall up with steel things clanking long-down by your side and other weapons in leather with which to defy your world. And your wagons coming up with maces and hatchets on end. Though I go not that way myself, truth to say, for I am of Moderan, where people have "replacements" from a new-metal alloy, "replacements" for limbs, "replacements" for organs, even "replacements" for hearts, and our flesh-strips are few and played down. I walk with a hitch worse than most, an inch-along kind of going, clop-clip-clap over the plastic yards, what little I walk, for I have bugs in the hinges. I was an Early, you see, one of

the first of Moderan. But I remember. Something in the pale green blood of my flesh-strips recalls how walking should be—a great going out with maces to pound up your enemies' heads, and a crunchy bloody jelly underfoot from the bones and juices of things too little even to be glanced at under your iron-clad feet.

But this guy! Hummph. He came like a lily. Yes, a white lily with bell-cone head bent down. I wondered why my warner even bothered with him. But yes, I knew why my warner bothered with him. My warner tells me of all movement toward my Stronghold, and sometimes the lilies—"Stand by for decontamination!" He was at my Outer Wall now, at the Screening Gate, so I directed my decontaminators and weapons probbers to give him the rub-a-dub. To be truthful, two large metal hands had leaped out of the Wall to seize him and hold him directly in front of the Screening Gate, so my call to "Stand by for decontamination!" was merely a courtesy blab. When the Decontamination and the Weapons Report both gave him a clean bill I thumbed the gates back in all my eleven steel walls and let the lily man mince through.

"Hello, and welcome, strange traveler from Far Wide."

He stood trembling in his soft-rag shoes, seeming hard put on how actually to stop his inch-mince walk. "Forgive me," he

said, "if I seem nervous." And he looked at me out of the blue of his flesh-ball eyes while he tugged at a cup-shaped red beard. And I was appalled at the "replacements" he had disallowed, the parts of himself he had clung to. For one wild blinding moment I was almost willing to bet that he had his real heart, even. But then I thought ah, no, not at this late year and in Moderan. "This walking," he continued, "keeps going. You see, it takes awhile to quiet. You know, getting here at last, I cannot, all of me, believe I am really here. My mind says yes! My poor legs keep thinking there's still walking to do. But I'm here!"

"You're here," I echoed, and I wondered, what next? what goes? I thought of the mice I had nailed and the new cat waiting and I was impatient to get on with my joys. But then, a visitor is a visitor, and a host most likely is a victim. "Have you eaten? Have you had your introven?"

"I've eaten," he said. He eyed at me strange-wide. "I didn't have introven."

I began to feel more uneasy by the minute. He just stood there vibrating slightly on thin legs, with those blue flesh-ball eyes peeking my way, and he seemed to be waiting for me to react. "I'm here!" he said again. And I said, "Yes," not knowing what else to say. "Would you wish to tell me about your trip," I asked, "the trials and tribulations?"

Then he started his recital. It was mostly a dreary long tune of hard going, of almost baseless hopes concerning what he hoped to find, of how he had kept coming, of how he had almost quit in the Space Mountains, of how something up ahead had kept him trying, something like a gleam of light through a break in an iron wall. "Get over the wall," he said, "and you have won it, all that light. Over the wall!" He looked at me as though this was surely my time to react.

"Why did you almost quit in the Space Mountains?"

"Why did I almost quit in the Space Mountains!! Have you ever tried the Space Mountains?" I had to admit that I had not. "If you have never tried the Space Mountains—" He fell into a fit of shaking that was more vivid than using many words. "Where are all the others?" he asked when the shaking had stopped a little.

"All the others? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, yes. There must be great groups here. There must be long lists waiting." His white cone-shaped face lit up. "Oh, they're in the Smile Room. That's it, isn't it?"

My big steel fingers itched to crush him then like juicing a little worm. There was something about him, so soft, so trustful and pleading and so all against my ideas of the iron mace and the big arm-swing walk. "There's no Smile Room

here," I blurted. "And no long lists waiting."

Unwilling to be crushed he smiled that pure little smile. "Oh, it must be such a wonderful machine. And so big! After all the other machines, the One, the ONE—finally!"

Great leaping lead balls bouncing on bare-flesh toes! What had we here? A nut? Or was he just lost from home? "Mister," I said, "I don't know what you're driving at. This is my home. It's where I wall out danger. It's where I wall in fun. My kind of fun. It's a Stronghold."

At the sound of that last word his blue eyes dipped over and down in his white-wash face; his head fell forward like trying to follow the eyes to where they were falling. And out of a great but invisible cloud that seemed to wrap him round his stricken mouth gaped wide. "A Stronghold! All this way I've come and it is a Stronghold! You have not the Happiness Machine at a Stronghold. It could not be.

"Oh, it is what kept me going—the hope of it. I was told. In the misty dangerous weird Space Mountains when the big wet-wing Gloom Glays jumped me and struck me down with their beaks I arose and kept coming. And on one very sullen rain-washed hapless morning I awoke in a white circle of the long-tusk wart-skin woebegawngawns, and oh it would have been so much easier, so very much less exacting, to have feigned sleep while

they tore me and opened my soul case with death. But no! I stood up. I remembered prophecy. I drew my cloak around me. I walked. I walked on. I left them staring with empty teeth. I thought of my destination. And now— It was a dream! I am fooled!—TAKE ME TO YOUR HAPPINESS MACHINE!"

He was becoming hysterical. He blabbed as how he wanted to go and sit in some machine gauged to beauty and truth and love and be happy. He was breaking down. I saw I must rally him for one more try, to get him beyond my Walls. "Mister," I said, "you have, no doubt, known the big clouds and the sun failing and the rain-washed gray dawn of the hopeless time. You have—I believe it—stood up in disaster amid adversity's singing knives and all you had going for you was what you had brought along. There were no armies massing for you on other fields, no uncles raising funds in far countries across seas; perhaps there were no children, even, coming for Daddy in the Space Mountains, and with death not even one widow to claim the body and weep it toward the sun. And yet you defied all this, somehow got out of disaster's tightening ring and moved on down. I admire you. I truly am sorry I do not have what you want. And though you are a kind of fool, by my way of thinking, to go running around in flesh looking for a pure something that perhaps does not exist, I wish you luck

as I thumb the gates back and make way for your progress. You may find, up ahead somewhere, across a lot of mountains, and barren land, these Happiness Machines for which you cry." He trembled when I spoke of mountains, but he moved out through the gates.

And though I was sure he would find nothing the way he was going, I have not been entirely able to forget him. What would prompt such a creature, obviously ill-equipped for any great achievement, to hope for the ultimate and impossibly-great achievement, happiness? And such an odd way to expect it, happiness dispensed by some magic machine gauged to beauty and truth and love. In a resplendent place at the end of a long trip.

To hear him talk you'd think happiness could be based on lily-weak things. How weird. Power is joy; strength is pleasure; put your trust only in the thick wall with the viewer and the warner. But sometimes, in spite of myself, I think of this little flesh-ridden man and wonder where he is.

And when I'm at my ease, feeding my flesh-strips the complicated fluids of the introven, knowing I can live practically forever with the help of the new-metal alloys, a vague uneasiness comes over me and I try to evaluate my life. With the machines that serve me all buzzing underneath my Stronghold and working fine—yes, I am satisfied,

I am aiequate. And when I want a little more than quiet satisfaction, I can probe out and destroy one of my neighbor's Walls perhaps, or a piece of his warner. And then we will fight lustily at each other for a little while from our Strongholds, pushing the destruction buttons at each other

in a kind of high glee. Or I can just keep home and work out some little sadistic pleasure on my own. And on the terms the flesh-man wanted—truth, beauty, love—I'm practically sure there is no Happiness Machine out there anywhere at all. I'm almost sure there isn't.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

Another action-packed complete novel by Alan Nourse will be featured in the December issue of AMAZING.



Star Surgeon is the exciting and deeply moving story of a young alien from Gary II whose sole purpose in life is to wear the scarlet cape and star of a surgeon in the service of Hospital Earth, administering to the medical needs throughout the Galaxy. His very alienness, his sensitivity and his complete dedication make him the perfect target for greedy and selfish Earthmen who will stop at nothing to prevent his dream from becoming a reality.

IN ADDITION: An unusual and compelling story, Knights of the Dark Tower, by Wilson Kane. One of your all-time favorites, Paul Fairman, will

be back with a short-short, A Great Night in the Heavens. And you can look forward to many more short stories plus all of our regular features.

Remember the December AMAZING goes on sale at all newsstands November 10th. Make sure you get a copy by reserving it with your newsdealer today.



the Spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

ONE AGAINST HERCULUM. *By Jerry Sohl.* 124 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.

Jerry Sohl is another example of S-F fan turned writer. He has been an avid reader since the early days of the Gernsback pulps. Now the tangible results of this long exposure to the milieu of the future can be seen in his latest novel, and quite an original one it is.

Overpopulation has become such a problem in the galaxy that citizens must spend ten years on one of the domed outpost worlds to gain the right to go back and live on their own planets. Advancement on these worlds is based on the yearly tests given by machines—a seemingly incorruptible system. Then one candidate, Alan Demuth, finds out that graft and intrigue exist even there. Thwarted in his rightful attempt to advance, he applies for a crime license. Under this, he is given twenty-four hours to commit his crime, or suffer the penalty himself.

Apart from some occasional stiffness in the dialogue, this is a commendable book. Mr. Sohl has paced his action so skillfully that he accomplishes all he set out to do, even though his novel is unusually short.

TOMORROW TIME'S SEVEN. *By Frederik Pohl.* 160 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

This is the latest collection of "Pohl-ianna"—seven stories that have appeared in various magazines, brought together for the first time between cover. The book is such a treasure house that it is hard to know what to applaud first.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature is Pohl's own brand of humor which provides the main tone of the volume. He does not try to force it on the reader by blunt or obvious satire. It is humor

of a far more elusive kind. As nearly as it can be pinned down, it seems to rely on taking some of Earth's seedier characters and putting them in contact with some of the most original outworlders this reviewer has ever seen. Thus, in "Survival Kit," we follow the fortunes of a petty crook as he tries to make a dishonest dollar out of a time traveler. In "The Gentle Venusian," an alcoholic survey man from Earth has a run-in with the law on Venus, where the creatures spend their entire lives playing games. In "The Day of the Boomer Dukes," a New York gang collides with another time traveler.

The spice and originality of these ideas are further enhanced by the author's invention of certain delicious words for names of men and objects, and by the contrasting dialogue between the Earth people and the Spacers. And if in the ends of most of the stories, the aliens seem to get the best of us or have the last word, no one can really object because it is all such good fun.

SECRET OF THE LOST RACE. *By Andre Norton. 132 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

In this novel, Miss Norton attempts a more complex subject than is usual with her; unfortunately, she does not completely succeed. She gives us her usual high standard as far as the adventure aspects of the story go, but the reasons behind the adventure don't carry the excitement and conviction that have become her hallmarks.

What we have is a chase to end all chases. The hero, a young man named Joktar, seems to be the sole object of a search and attack by all the forces of the galaxy. He runs and plans and tricks and fights constantly, all without knowing why he seems to be the object of everyone's hatred. As mentioned before, the author generates plenty of suspense and puts her hero in some interesting locales. But when we discover the reasons behind all this activity, they seem strangely unexciting and anticlimactic. She hasn't left herself enough time or space to make the reader really believe or care.





Or so you say

Dear Editor:

May I add these footnotes to the excellent article by Isaac Asimov: "The Unused Stars" (July *Amazing*.) First, Astor and Pollux were in mythology the twin sons of Jupiter and Leda, and should not be confused by readers with the Romulus and Remus of Roman proto-history.

Second, as to Regulus in Leo (also called cor leonis, "heart of the lion"). Since Regulus more nearly follows the course of the sun through the zodiac than does any other prominent star, may not the ancients have named this star "the little kind" as a sort of second-lyre player to the great Apollo?

The last of these remarks within the realm of naked-eye astronomy concerns the practice of outlining constellations and asterisms by "drawing lines" from star to star. The age of star names must frequently be measured in millennia—time enough for apparent shift in position of some stars. Not enough time, perhaps, for significant change in man's innate perceptivity; but time enough, possibly, for an increasing opacity in Earth's atmosphere to obscure those configurations in depth and form among the star masses and dust clouds of the night sky which were so full of portent to people of another time. Occasionally on the clearest of nights one may sense a bison shape in Taurus that is far different from the outline of that constellation shown in any handbook for stargazers. Sometimes, in season and with luck, the most sophisticated may see within and around the northern cross some hint of that feathered beauty which his ancestors may have seen more clearly as the south-seeking swan.

Claire Beck
1142 N. Oak St.
Ukia, California

- *Thank you for some interesting (and nicely put!) speculations on the constellations.*

Dear Editor:

Being an artist, I can greatly appreciate the covers and interior illustrations in *Amazing*. I've been reading s-f for eight years and by now I'm pretty disgusted with the corny illustrations. However, your magazine offers first-rate pictures with first-rate stories. Let's have more of it.

I think you should have a few cartoons each month to add still another department to your already great magazine. Something to illustrate the problems encountered in future exploitations.

Chris Roe
710 Somerset Ave.
Taunton, Mass.

• *Good—really good—s-f cartoons are hard to come by. When and if we get 'em, we'll run 'em.*

Dear Editor:

I was particularly interested in the article, "The Unused Stars," by Isaac Asimov which appeared in the July *Amazing*. I've been an amateur astronomer of sorts for six or seven years.

I think Mr. Asimov has made a few errors in his description of Mizar and Alcor. First, he says that Mizar means "veil" and Alcor means "the weak one." I would like to know where he got that translation. I have before me a copy of *Field Book of the Skies*, by Olcott & Mayall. On page 62 it says: "The Arabs called these stars the 'Horse and Rider.'" They are referring to Mizar and Alcor. I have found this translation in several astronomy books, but I have never heard them called "veil" and "the weak one."

I would also like to comment on the part about Mizar and Alcor being a test for good eyesight. If the Arabs used these stars as an eyesight test, they must have had poor eyes. I have normal vision and I can see Alcor almost anytime I see Mizar. I think it's as much a matter of knowing where to look as having good eyesight. They should have used Epsilon Lyrae. That's a lot harder than Mizar.

Craig Wisch
11490 Bradhurst
Whittier, Calif.

• *How about it, Isaac? Been to the optician lately?*

Dear Editor:

I have subscriptions to both *Fantastic* and *Amazing*, but have one complaint: quit using amateur writers who you call "brilliant new

writers." Use a story by Ed Hamilton even if it does cost you a little more.

Kenneth E. Cooper
4641 Clintonville Rd.
Pontiac, Mich.

- *Even Hamilton was an amateur when he started. So were all the others. How are we going to uncover new s-f writers unless we expose a few to the critical readers?*

Dear Editor:

Recent issues seem to prove what I had hoped for but didn't really expect. That *Amazing* could really come back to the standards set in "the good old days."

The March issue was pretty special. Any issue that starts off a new Doc Smith story can't help being rather remarkable. But as you said, This was no one shot issue, all the featured stories since then have been very fine and the most recent, Lloyd Biggle's "A Taste of Fire" is as fine a case of good old space opera as it has been my pleasure to read in many a year.

You really seem to have shot the works on the matter of short stories, which is something that wasn't even done in the old days. The names of the writers in recent months are practically a who's who of s-f writers. But of them all I would like to single out one for special praise; Les Collins. He shows signs of becoming one of the very best of the newer writers in the field.

Reading some *real* s-f again after these many years is enough to make an old-timer such as myself almost admit that the good *new* days just might be even better. You have surely made a good start at it.

Clayton Hamlin
28 Earle Ave.
Bangor, Me.

- *We're glad you mentioned Les Collins, Mr. Hamlin. He's a talented young writer who merits recognition.*

Dear Editor:

Nuetzell's work is great. Don't lose him. Keep up your long novels. I'm looking forward to the sequel to "Hunters Out of Time" that

you said might be obtained soon. Where are those Frosty cartoons? Please illustrate your novels a little more like your old novels.

Michael Carroll
112 Tobar
El Paso, Texas

- *We have a brand new Nuetzell cover on tap and the sequel to "Hunters Out of Time" is really in the works.*

Dear Editor:

I hadn't had much experience with *Amazing* before, because most of the time I have my nose in a book of s-f. Then my family got me a year's subscription to the magazine. I glanced through it, not thinking I'd find much, after all. I got a pleasant surprise and so am now planning to spend a lot of time with *Amazing*.

This magazine is unquestionably one of the finest I've known. I acquired my disgust for these things because of some of the lower-rate, uninteresting material in some of them. This one has raised my hopes for daily material.

Jonathan Yoder
1105 Monroe St.
Evanston, Ill.

- *Readers take note: No more racking your brains to find the ideal gift for friends and family. A year's subscription to Amazing will put you in solid!*

Dear Editor:

Have just finished reading your June issue from cover to cover. "A Handful of Stars," by Poul Anderson is one of the finest novels I've read in three years of reading science fiction magazines.

Richard C. Keyes
San Francisco, Calif.

- *You and all other Poul Anderson fans have a treat coming your way when the December issue of Fantastic (Amazing's sister mag) goes on sale next month. It will feature another great novel with Dominic Flandry headlining the action.*

Dear Editor:

I have just finished Lloyd Biggle's novel "A Taste of Fire." It is one of the best I have ever read in *Amazing*. An entirely different twist to the psionic powers plots. Keep up the good work in this part of your magazine.

(Continued on page 146)

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(continued)

WANTED

WANTED: Argosy for December 16th, 1953. Will pay top price. Quote to Lewis D. Harrell, 2538 20th Place, West, Birmingham 8, Alabama.

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STORY Criticism 4 1/2¢ a word plus return postage. Snouse, 2508 Hart Avenue, Santa Clara, Calif.

... OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 144)

The cover was excellent. Summers is to be congratulated on a beautiful piece of work. Just one suggestion though: why don't you have your covers illustrating the novel or a short story appearing in that issue. One good illo does wonders for a story.

The short stories were all good.

I'm glad to see that one of my favorite authors, Murray Leinster is going to appear in the next issue with a full-length novel. It should be great.

Billy Joe Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Alabama

• *We agree with you about illos, Mr. Plott. So much so that we feel it would be a shame to turn down a fine s-f cover just because it doesn't explicitly describe a particular scene in a story. You'll find that the cover usually bears some connection to a story in the issue. At times the representation is exact, at other times it is symbolic or abstract, but nevertheless it's there.*

Dear Editor:

It's always one of the nicest things to me to see that a highly advertised Amazing Novel lived up to all of former expectations. I am speaking of "Long Ago, Far Away," by Murray Leinster. Congratulations. All in all, a very fine issue. Beautiful big, orange cover also.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Alabama

• *Thank you very much. And thank you, too, Mr. Leinster.*

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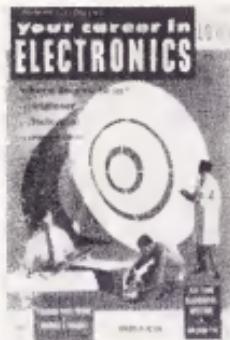
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